

Adventure STORIES





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the days of DAVY CROCKETT



By Clive Hopwood
Illustrated by Glenn Rix



Snow lay thick upon the ground and hung heavily on the branches of the trees as the bobcat wove its sleek, feline way through the undergrowth. On the scent of a young deer, it paused in its silent quest, the sensitive eyes probing through the trees for a sight of its prey. A slight movement, glimpsed between the heavy-laden boughs, and the bobcat edged forward stealthily, muscles superbly poised for instant pursuit.

The deer, seemingly unaware, continued pawing at the ground through the snow, its head bobbing as it scratched out the occasional tasty morsel. The bobcat, a quiet and secretive animal, is that deadliest of foes, the silent hunter, and in the backwoods neither man nor beast can ever feel sure that the eyes of a bobcat are not following his every move. Sure of itself, the big cat closed in for the kill, its muscular legs powering it through the soft, deep carpet of snow. At the last instant it caught sight of another creature, concealed and waiting, the upright stance bearing the mark of a man.

A single shot rang out and the bobcat dropped in its tracks, the startled deer straining at its leash to flee from the noise.

Davy Crockett stepped into the clearing and surveyed the warm, furred body, a neat hole penetrating its skull behind the ear. Slinging the catch over his shoulder he untied the deer, the bait he had used to lure his prey and, whistling, set off through the trees.

He felt supremely satisfied, the satisfaction of the hunter who knows he has overcome a skilful and worthy adversary. It had been the labour of many days, as time after time the bobcat had sprung his traps and escaped with the carefully laid bait. Davy had enjoyed the contest, the matching of one hunter against another, pitting of patience and cunning against instinct.

Reaching his cabin, Davy tethered the deer securely in an adjoining outhouse and hung the bobcat in a separate compartment ready for skinning later. Alongside it numerous furs and skins of fox, mink, and beaver stood silent witness to Davy's skill as a hunter and trapper. It had been a good winter, his haul of furs from hunting and trapping well past his expectations.





He went into the cabin, stoked the fire up with some wood, and put on some coffee to heat. Outside a faint wind threw flurries of light, powdery snow against the door, and the sky darkened, looking set for another snowfall before the day was out.

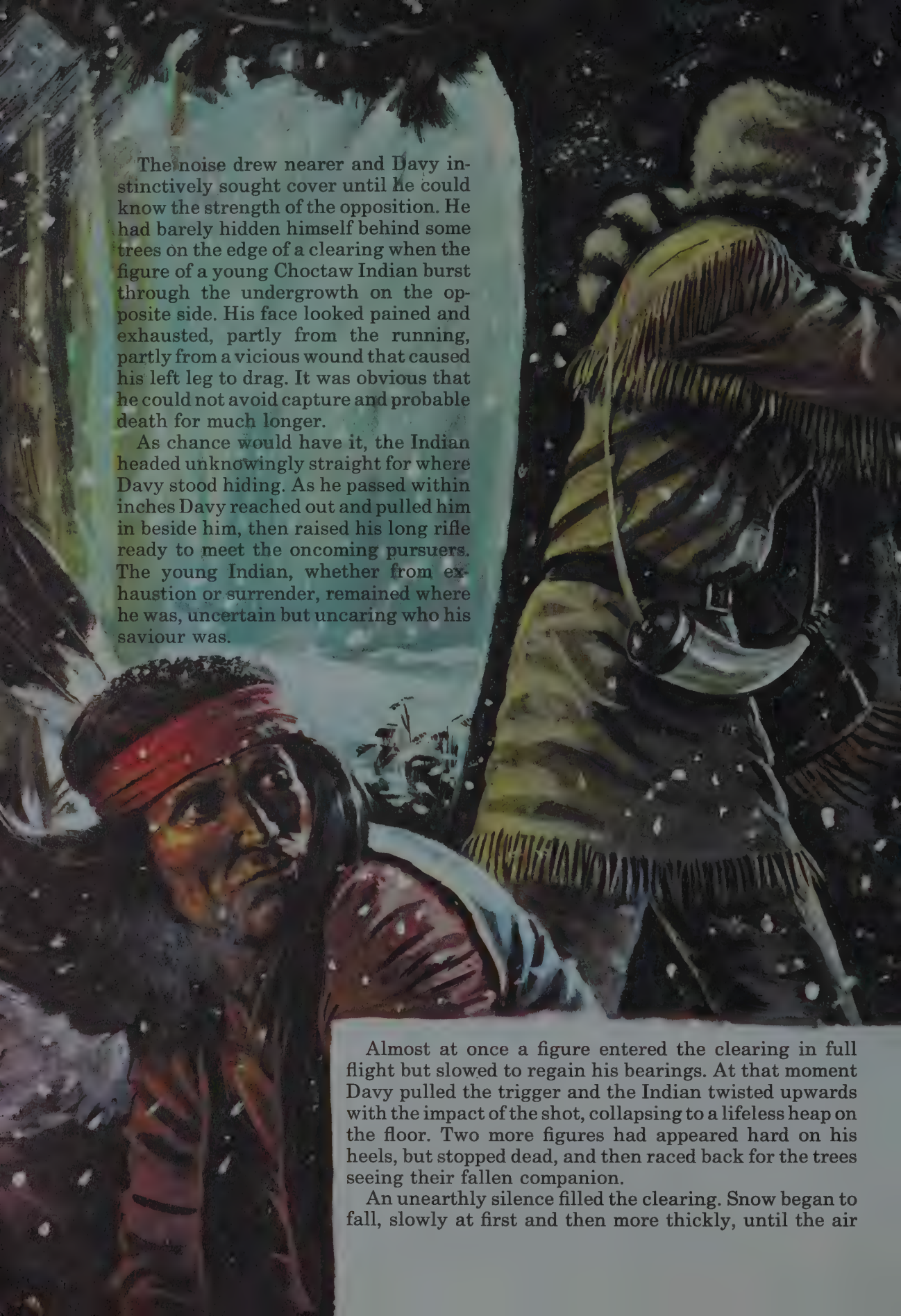
A loner by nature, Davy enjoyed the occasional company of his fellow man on his visits to small towns and trading posts, but preferred the vast, uninhabited reaches of the backwoods. Not that to Davy the backwoods were uninhabited. True that few men, except trappers and hunters like himself, ventured into their largely unexplored depths, but the country teemed with wildlife, their infinite variety and character never ceasing to make him wonder.

He finished his coffee, and took up his long rifle and powder horn. He would have time to collect his day's catch from the traps and reset them before the snowstorm closed in. His tall, rangy form filled the small cabin which he had built himself only as a place to sleep, eat and take shelter in between hunting. Outside was all the space he needed. Like the animals he hunted, he saw home as a haven from storms, a refuge to return to, and nothing more.

He opened the door and stepped out into the bracing air. He was about to start off when the distant sound of human voices, away to his left, caught his attention. To hear a human voice was a strange enough occurrence in itself, but these sounded threatening. He cocked his ear and listened. If he were not mistaken these were Indians on the hunt, and by the noise they were making their prey was human rather than animal.

He began a slow trot towards the receding shouts, and presently he heard them change direction towards him. Their quarry, whoever it might be, was obviously endeavouring to make towards the river, which lay some half mile beyond Davy's cabin. Perhaps the fugitive hoped to swim to safety through the deep, swirling waters that characterised the river in these parts. It would certainly be the act of a desperate man, for the currents were swift and dangerous at this point, but from the shouts and yelps Davy was in no doubt that this party of Indians were not tracking their man, but had him in sight and were in full pursuit. Davy reckoned them to be less than a mile distant, and closing fast.





The noise drew nearer and Davy instinctively sought cover until he could know the strength of the opposition. He had barely hidden himself behind some trees on the edge of a clearing when the figure of a young Choctaw Indian burst through the undergrowth on the opposite side. His face looked pained and exhausted, partly from the running, partly from a vicious wound that caused his left leg to drag. It was obvious that he could not avoid capture and probable death for much longer.

As chance would have it, the Indian headed unknowingly straight for where Davy stood hiding. As he passed within inches Davy reached out and pulled him in beside him, then raised his long rifle ready to meet the oncoming pursuers. The young Indian, whether from exhaustion or surrender, remained where he was, uncertain but uncaring who his saviour was.

Almost at once a figure entered the clearing in full flight but slowed to regain his bearings. At that moment Davy pulled the trigger and the Indian twisted upwards with the impact of the shot, collapsing to a lifeless heap on the floor. Two more figures had appeared hard on his heels, but stopped dead, and then raced back for the trees seeing their fallen companion.

An unearthly silence filled the clearing. Snow began to fall, slowly at first and then more thickly, until the air



was virtually opaque with white blots. Minutes passed, and Davy, accustomed to the slow, patient stance of the hunter, stood his ground, motioning the Indian beside him to be still. The Indian needed no second bidding; he too knew the laws of the hunter.

After some considerable length of time, discerning no movement, the hunting party obviously decided it was at last safe to venture forward. Davy, having reloaded, allowed them to advance almost as far as the prostrate body before unleashing a second deadly volley. The remainder fled into the trees within seconds.

"It'll be safe now," whispered Davy. "They won't dare come out into the open again. They'll circle slowly round the clearing to try and come up back of us—but we'll be long gone. Come on."

Helping the young Indian up, Davy painstakingly withdrew from their position, eyes and ears alert for any possible attack. There was none. Before long, however, it became evident that his companion—weak and ill-clad for such severe weather—was close to dropping. Davy bent and slung him across his shoulder like a carcass, the Indian too feeble to protest, and proceeded to carry him.

It was almost half an hour before Davy and his burden gained the shelter of the cabin. It was a hard haul and Davy felt the relief flood into his body as he laid the now unconscious Indian on the floor beside the stove. He stooped and put an ear to the injured man's chest. He was still breathing at least. Despite the cold, blood was oozing from the wound on his thigh, which was obviously in need of immediate attention.

Davy carried the limp figure to the bed, and made the necessary preparations to attend to the wound, which from all appearances was the type delivered by a tomahawk blow. The Indian remained mercifully unconscious and Davy set to work.

It was three clear days before the Indian fully regained his senses. During that time the snow storm continued more or less unabated. Davy was reluctant to leave his charge for long periods and only ventured out on short forays to catch some small game for food. He watched the Indian anxiously, heaping the unconscious figure with furs, and keeping the stove burning fiercely day and night to keep out the cold which he knew might prove fatal for the sick man.

What his tale would be Davy could only guess. Meanwhile he kept a wary eye out for any sign of the other Indians returning, but guessed that the bad

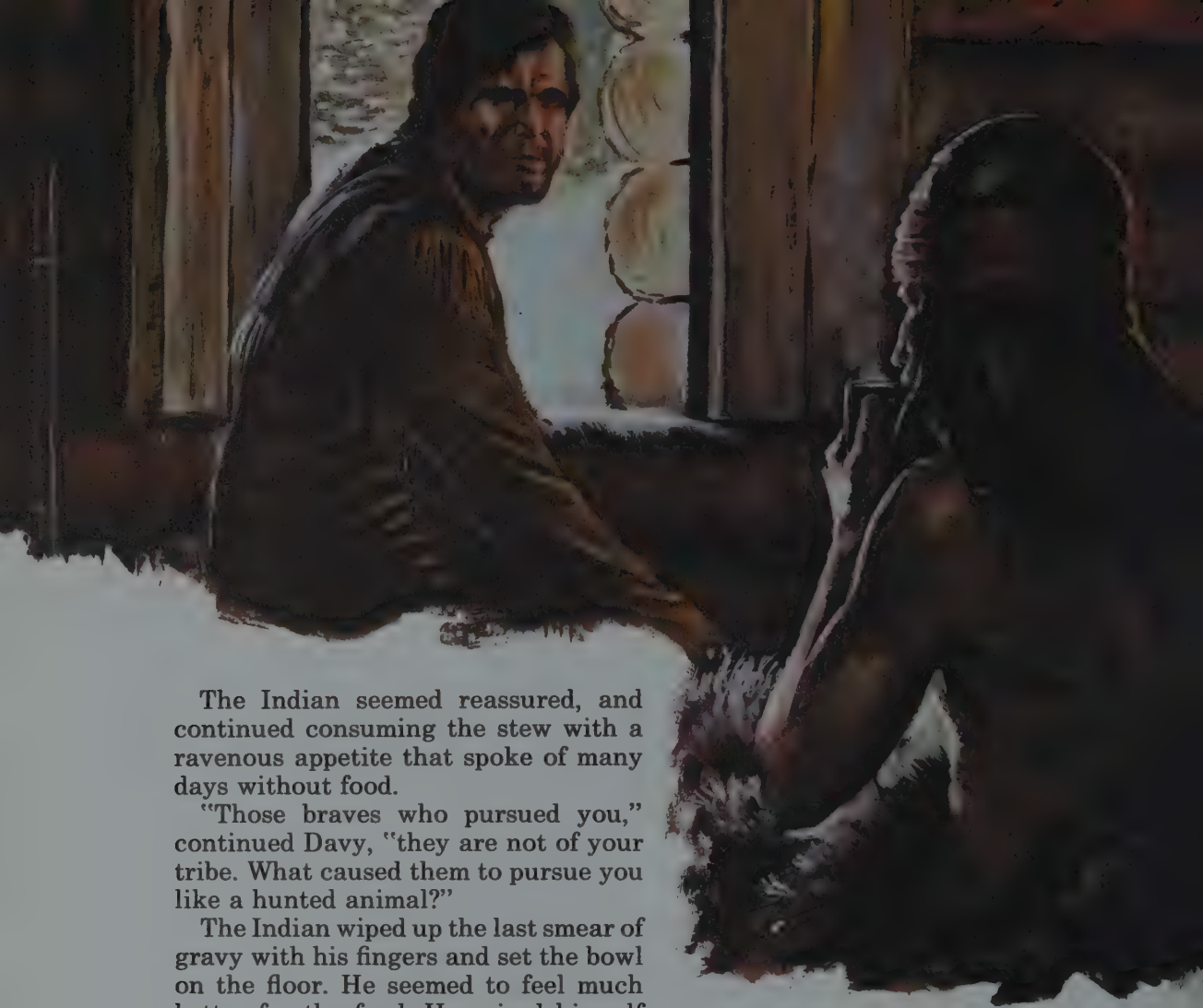




weather had fortunately intervened to dissuade them from further pursuit.

At last, over a period of some hours, the wounded Indian regained consciousness. He drifted in and out of a semi-dreamlike state like waves beating upon a shore, his mind obviously troubled by the events leading up to his rescue. When finally he seemed to register where he was, the brave slowly found his memory of Davy coming back to him and could not thank him enough for saving his life. Davy calmed him, handed him a bowl of thick, meaty rabbit stew, and sat down beside him on the makeshift bed.

"You are a Choctaw," said Davy, speaking in the Indian's own tongue. The Indian nodded, surprised to hear his own language spoken by so unfamiliar a figure. Davy smiled. "I know your people well. Many times I have taken food and smoked the pipe of peace with your great chiefs."



The Indian seemed reassured, and continued consuming the stew with a ravenous appetite that spoke of many days without food.

"Those braves who pursued you," continued Davy, "they are not of your tribe. What caused them to pursue you like a hunted animal?"

The Indian wiped up the last smear of gravy with his fingers and set the bowl on the floor. He seemed to feel much better for the food. He raised himself stiffly on one elbow.

"They are a renegade band of the Wichita tribe, my white brother."

"But I had not heard that Choctaw and Wichita were at war," replied Davy. "Surely these are peaceful peoples who live their lives in harmony together?"

The brave shook his head. "I will tell you a tale, white brother, of much grief and many deaths." Davy handed the Indian a cup of hot coffee and sat back to listen.

"One moon past, I and several braves from my tribe were on a hunting trip to collect food for my village. It has been a hard winter and we were forced to go far in our search." Davy nodded, understanding. "One day we were camped by the great river when this band of Wichita braves descended upon us, slaughtering my brothers without mercy. I alone escaped, and for many days they have followed me, fearful no doubt that I should return to my people and tell of this treachery."

The Indian paused to take a sip from the steaming cup.

"Well, at least you've lived to tell the tale," said Davy.

"And to seek vengeance for my dead brothers," returned the Indian.

"Not just yet," answered Davy, beginning to unwrap the bandage around the Indian's leg. "This wound is going to take a while to heal. You'll be in no fit state to go on the warpath for a month or two, I'd say. The leg needs rest first, and then to be gradually brought back into use. Hurry this and you could have a limp for the rest of your life."

The Indian smiled. "You speak wisely, white brother. I am hot-headed, impatient to hunt down my enemy—but like the hunter I must wait until I am ready, concentrate all my energies onto my prey, and let the Great Spirits guide me to him when the time is right." He looked down at the cleaned wound approvingly. "You make good medicine and save my life—but what should I call you, white brother?"

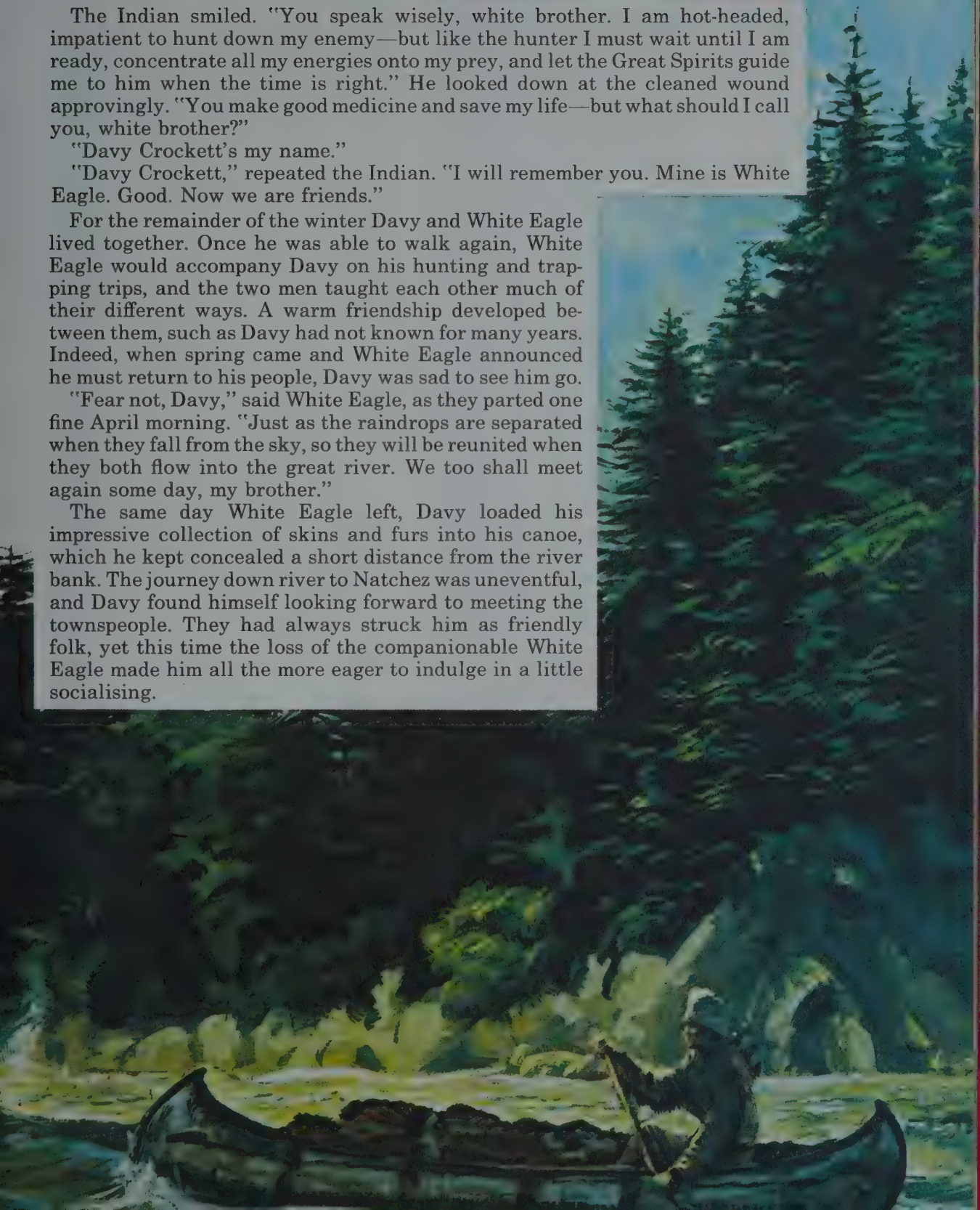
"Davy Crockett's my name."

"Davy Crockett," repeated the Indian. "I will remember you. Mine is White Eagle. Good. Now we are friends."

For the remainder of the winter Davy and White Eagle lived together. Once he was able to walk again, White Eagle would accompany Davy on his hunting and trapping trips, and the two men taught each other much of their different ways. A warm friendship developed between them, such as Davy had not known for many years. Indeed, when spring came and White Eagle announced he must return to his people, Davy was sad to see him go.

"Fear not, Davy," said White Eagle, as they parted one fine April morning. "Just as the raindrops are separated when they fall from the sky, so they will be reunited when they both flow into the great river. We too shall meet again some day, my brother."

The same day White Eagle left, Davy loaded his impressive collection of skins and furs into his canoe, which he kept concealed a short distance from the river bank. The journey down river to Natchez was uneventful, and Davy found himself looking forward to meeting the townspeople. They had always struck him as friendly folk, yet this time the loss of the companionable White Eagle made him all the more eager to indulge in a little socialising.





At that time of year Natchez was always full of travellers of one kind or another. Trappers and fur traders descended on the town to buy and sell furs, and Davy came across many friends and acquaintances with whom he spent many an enjoyable evening, drinking and talking over old times, or relating news of recent events. In the absence of any more reliable source of news, word of mouth accounts were passed between travellers when they met, and Davy having seen virtually nobody during his time in the backwoods, was an eager listener.

Davy was talking one day to a trader by the name of Leclerque. He was a Frenchman who dealt in a wide number of goods, including furs, which was how Davy came to know him. Leclerque was widely travelled, and his dealings often took him far afield, visiting Indian settlements far to the north. He had made mention, in passing, of a particularly savage incident related to him by one tribe when their village had been raided by a band of Wichita braves. Recalling White Eagle's story instantly, Davy enquired if the Frenchman had heard any further details of this band.

"*Mais oui, mon ami,*" began Leclerque, "everywhere I go I hear these terrible stories. In some places every village has a tale to tell of these murderers."

"And it's always the same band, huh?" asked Davy.

"That is so, Davy," answered Leclerque. "I hear that these are a band of renegade warriors from the Wichita tribe. Their leader, Black Bear, was made an outcast from his people and he left, taking some of the more rebellious young warriors with him. They have become, er . . . the word . . . nomadic, travelling round, raiding villages, murdering, stealing food, weapons, clothes. It is a terrible thing, no?"

"I've heard of them myself," replied Davy, "but until now I didn't know who

they were. I didn't *think* the Wichitas were at war."

"*Mais non*, but this band," said the Frenchman, throwing his hands in the air, "they are at war with everyone. But this Black Bear, he is a clever one. They try to catch him, but always he escapes, he is the devil himself. Few are the men who have lived to tell of his treachery. *Mon ami*, I tell you," continued Leclerque, drawing Davy towards him, "I have heard of him killing whole villages of women and children and old men while the braves are away hunting. Ah, an evil man, Davy. I hope we may never meet, may *le bon Dieu* preserve me."

The tale interested Davy greatly and his mind drifted to thoughts of White Eagle. He wondered whether he too had heard these stories when he returned to his village, and how his quest for vengeance was progressing. Doubtless, if such a notorious outlaw were caught, the news would spread far and wide.

The next two or three days Davy was busy buying provisions for his next hunting expedition, and he thought little more about it, although new arrivals to the town brought several varying stories of Black Bear's vile exploits. It wasn't until the morning of his departure that Davy became truly involved in the whole business.

He was stocking up with one or two final oddments for his trip when a man burst in through the door. Old Joe, who ran the store, was known for his rudimentary but sound knowledge of medicine, and folk often came to him for help or advice. Situated at the north end of town, he was frequently the nearest available source of first aid for injured men coming into town from the open country.

"Better come quick, Joe," said the man, hurriedly. "There's a man out here hurt real bad."

"Mind the store, will you, Maisy," clipped Joe, reaching for his hat and coat and, accompanied by Davy, he hurried out to see what was wrong.

A large crowd had already gathered on the opposite side of the street, and Joe and Davy had to push their way through to get to the injured man. A ragged, filthy appearance suggested that he had been travelling on foot for some days, a jagged cut across his forehead and a blood-soaked sleeve testifying to some kind of fight.

The man, while obviously seriously ill, was anxious to pass on his news. Through hollowed eye sockets he focused wearily on Joe and Davy, the breath coming in shallow, rasping gasps while he spoke.

"Wagon train, near Natchitoches," he blurted, "just three wagons . . . heading west. . . ." He paused to catch his breath, coughing a little blood. After





a moment he continued, despite attempts to quieten him. "Indians . . . out of nowhere . . . killed all men . . . took my wife . . . left me for dead . . . escaped . . . you must . . . you must. . ."

His voice faded to silence as the effort became too much for him and he passed out in Joe's arms.

"Better get him inside, boys," said Joe, and a dozen willing hands bent to pick up the man.

Davy stood up, a thoughtful look on his face. He found Leclerque by his side. It was evident their thoughts were the same.

"It looks like this Black Bear is still at large, *mon ami*," commented Leclerque.

Davy nodded slowly. "I reckon it's about time somebody went out and caught that varmint. Seems to me he's done enough killing and now this woman—"

"You think maybe he keep her alive?"

"Maybe. She is a white woman after all," replied Davy. "Could be he sees her as some kind of prize."

"I do not like the look I see in your eyes, *mon ami*, It says you are thinking that perhaps you are the man who will hunt down this Black Bear."

"Whatever gives you that idea, Frenchie?" grinned Davy. "It just so happens I was thinking of heading up towards Natchitoches anyway. What I hunt for when I get there depends on what I find." Leclerque thought he discerned a slight twinkle in Davy's eyes. "Now, if you'll excuse me, there's a couple of things I still need from the store."

Leclerque watched Davy walk determinedly across the street to the store, and he knew he was right. He had known Davy long enough to recognise that once he had an idea there was no shaking him. Never one to miss an opportunity, he also realised this piece of news would be worth a drink or two from his friends . . . Davy Crockett was going on a manhunt, to find Black Bear.

Three days' hard walking along the trail brought Davy to the Spanish mission at Natchitoches, where he found that fear of Black Bear and his renegade band was widespread among the inhabitants. Local Indians had discovered the burnt-out remains of the wagons, and several bodies, and people were daily expecting a raid.

The mission priest, as might be expected, was more reliably informed. He welcomed Davy and invited him to stay overnight before venturing on his expedition. Over supper he brought Davy up to date with the most recent reports.

"I am a man of God, Senor Crockett," said the priest, as they relaxed after the meal, "and while I cannot wish you to kill this evil Black Bear, I will pray for you that you may return safely. As to the whereabouts of this renegade, the last thing I hear was from a hunter like yourself, who passed through two days ago. He tell me that he see a small band of Indians crossing the Boueuf River. There is a small lake about twenty miles north of where the Boueuf joins the Ouachita River. Do you know it?"

"I do. Did this fella say if he saw the white woman?"

"He did, senor. This is how I know it is Black Bear when you tell me of the woman he captures. At least she is still alive, may God protect her." The priest offered to refill Davy's glass. "Tell me, senor, do you intend to defeat these men all by yourself? Surely it is dangerous."

"I'm a hunter," replied Davy, simply. "I do it best alone. Rest assured, I have no intention of getting myself killed. Now, if I may, I'll get to my bed. I plan an early start in the morning."

"Of course, senor," said the priest, rising. "And God speed you on your way. You are a brave man."



It is a difficult thing for an animal that is used to being an all-powerful hunter to adapt to the secret ways that the hunted must adopt. So it was with Black Bear and his band. Apart from their unsuccessful skirmish the previous winter with Davy, they had suffered no fatalities in their lightning raids, and this unchecked progress had made them grow disproportionately arrogant of their strength and invincibility. While not openly inviting attack, they had become less cautious about covering their tracks, and once Davy had closed the gap between them, he found no difficulty in following their trail.

For two weeks, once he had located them, he followed their progress north along the banks of the Mississippi, biding his time, waiting his opportunity to strike.

He had seen the white woman in the camp, and while she was sometimes treated rather roughly, there was no danger of her being killed. Davy knew he would, as always, be best served by patience and vigilance. He had carefully observed their daily routine, making a mental note of things that particularly reoccurred, probing for a weakness in their defences. It became





clear that Black Bear had a nightly practice of securing the woman to a tree, as soon as supper was over. While the braves sat round the fire and shared a pipe, there was little or no attention paid to the helpless captive. In this Davy saw his chance.

This particular night the campfire was set at a greater distance from the captive, thus providing Davy with the ideal opportunity to make his move. Waiting until darkness covered the woods, Davy made his way down to the bank of the river, and slipped silently into the shallow waters. He edged his way carefully along until he reached a point directly opposite the woman and, crawling on his stomach through the undergrowth, he slowly moved towards her, his senses acutely tuned to give warning of any sign of discovery.

She stood, head bowed forward as if in sleep, her long black hair cascading down over her shoulders, her long skirt billowing gently in the slight breeze. Holding his breath in, and hugging the shadows, Davy crept round to the rear of the tree.

"Don't make a sound," he whispered to her, "and we'll have you free in no time."

With a sudden whoop the figure pushed itself away from the tree, and Davy started in momentary horror as his gaze met the eyes of a Wichita warrior, his knife drawn. Within seconds the other braves were upon him, and he was dragged, struggling, to stand before Black Bear. In the firelight the Indian's cruel features looked demonic, an evil leer on his face.

"I see I baited the trap with the right meat," said Black Bear in the tongue of the Wichitas. "The great white hunter was completely fooled." His hand lashed out, knocking Davy to the ground. "I too am a hunter, white man, a greater one than you. Did you think I would have all my braves around me as we travelled, like so many cattle? No! Grey Hawk has been stalking you for three days—and now we have pounced on our prey."





Davy cursed himself silently for his oversight, one that could cost him his life. The Indian towered over him, looking down at his still form with a menacing glare.

"Bring the white woman to me," he bellowed. "She must see this."

Two braves immediately detached themselves from the group. Black Bear walked round the prone figure of Davy as he continued, the firelight flickering in his eyes.

"I could kill you with one blow," he said, slamming his fist into his palm, "but it is not a fitting end for a hunter. Instead we shall give you the chance that all animals have against the hunter—but first . . ." He paused, grinning at the expectant faces of the assembled braves. ". . . first we will make you run the gauntlet. You know, of course, of the old Indian custom? Should you survive you are free to try and make your escape, without weapons, you understand."

Davy understood all too well. The custom of running the gauntlet was one commonly used to test the bravery of warriors. Two rows of braves would form, a few feet apart, a narrow tunnel running between them. The warrior had to run down the middle while the braves rained blows on him with stones, clubs and tomahawks. Davy must first survive this test before he faced the challenge of being hunted down like an animal. It was not a pleasant prospect.

Within a matter of moments, two lines of armed warriors stood before him, their weapons threateningly poised to deal Davy his death blow. Regaining his breath, Davy steeled himself for the challenge, tensing his muscles with an iron determination. Black Bear's command broke through the still night air, and the test began.

Davy launched himself forward, feinting sharply to the right, his shoulder catching the first Indian a stunning blow in the midriff. Doubling up in pain, the brave crashed sideways into the next man, crucially disturbing the aim of the first two or three blows in the line. A tomahawk shaft glanced down across his back as Davy strode on, now veering to the left of the line, his arms chopping right and left, sending the weapons wildly astray.





A club caught him squarely on his side, knocking him off balance, and he fell to one knee. But, quickly taking advantage of the force of the blow, Davy flung himself at the legs of two warriors, toppling them, and continued his roll, narrowly missing the deadly sweep of a powerfully swung rock.

Drawing on all his agility he almost literally bounced to his feet, his legs levering away like pistons as he pushed aside the final warrior, a blade streaking past him, grazing his forehead. Almost as soon as it had begun the first ordeal was over and he had survived.

Ignoring the pain of his injuries he powered away into the trees, the disarrayed Indians slow to realise that he had miraculously escaped. Those vital seconds were what Davy needed. They gave him an invaluable head start of a few yards, for within seconds the first of the braves, led by Black Bear, surged after him, weapons held aloft.

To hunt an animal successfully one must know its ways, and be able to forecast accurately its given actions in any situation. Years of experience now repaid their value in full during those next, perilous minutes. The tricks of creatures that had escaped him and eluded capture now served Davy in a way he would always be thankful for. His diligence in learning the lessons of the hunter was never more valuable to him as he turned and swerved, creating first one false trail, then another, his delaying tactics all the time confusing and then gradually losing his pursuers one by one.



An hour later, exhausted and bleeding, Davy stopped running. His breath came in fast, convulsive gasps as he supported himself against a tree, his senses alert for any further sounds of pursuit. There were none. He had faced the toughest challenge of his life and lived. The knowledge strengthened him and his thoughts soon turned to his incompleted task—the rescue of the white woman—but this time he knew he must not fail.

The moon hung high and clear in the night sky as Davy approached Black Bear's camp. The Indians had obviously abandoned the chase, for most of them lay sleeping around the fading fire, although guards had evidently been posted.

Davy was just pondering his best plan of attack when he saw one of the guards drop to the ground like a stone, his heart transfixed by an arrow. Within seconds, the clearing was alive with the cries of battle, as figures emerged from the trees on all sides and fell upon the sleeping camp. It was a swift and ruthless attack, against which Black Bear's braves were helpless. In the clear, moonlit night they were easy targets.

Davy hesitated, watching from his position of cover. For an instant he saw the figure of Black Bear, unnoticed, slipping away towards the river. In a flash Davy was after him. He caught him at the water's edge, bringing the powerful Indian down with a lungeing dive. A blade flashed through the air, but Davy deflected the descending arm, smashing his other fist into his opponent's jaw. The renegade staggered backwards, stunned, and Davy leapt onto him, pinning him to the ground.

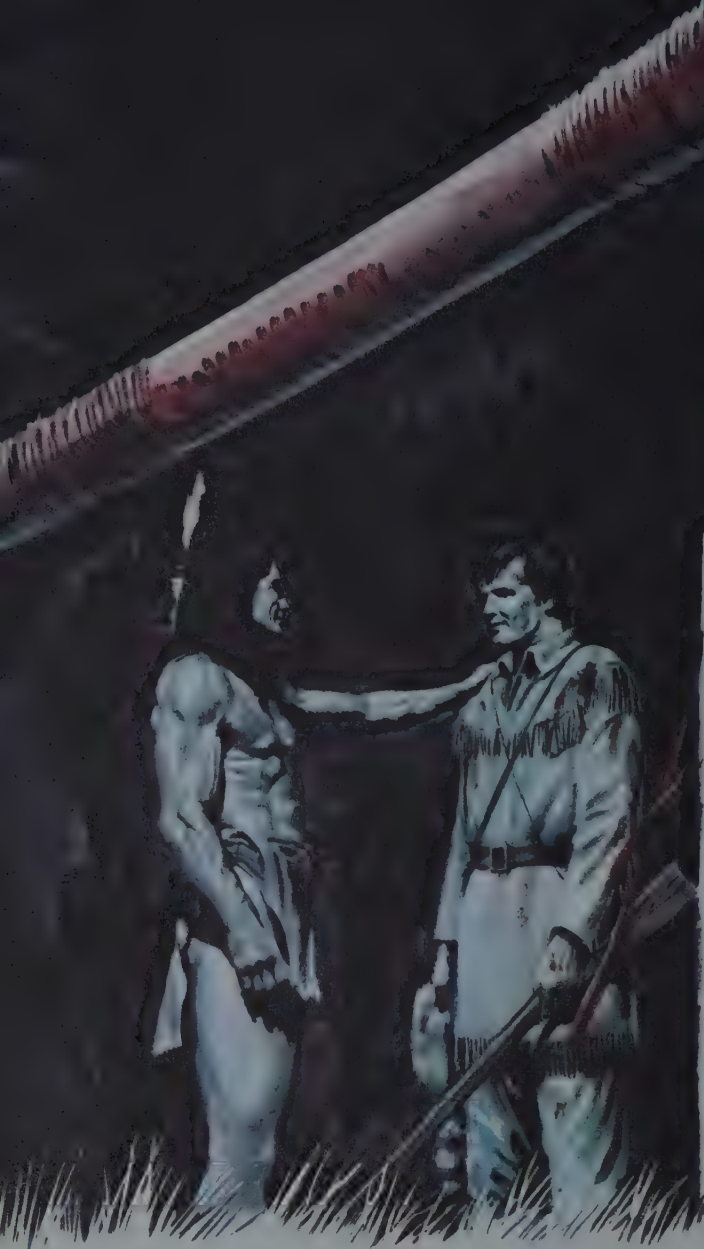
Black Bear's mystery assailants had by now caught sight of the struggle and one or two rushed over to help bring back the semi-conscious captive. As Davy followed them he caught sight of a distinctive figure held in the reflected light of the fire's dying embers. A long, healed scar on his thigh made it obvious that the man was none other than White Eagle. The battle between the two bands was all but over, and Davy entered the clearing to greet his old friend.

White Eagle, directing his braves to secure prisoners, recognised him at once and did not seem at all surprised to see him.

"It is good to see you still alive, white brother. I must confess to using you as a hunter would a deer."

Davy looked puzzled, but White Eagle continued, "For two days and two nights we have watched Black Bear, but I knew that he did not have all his braves with him. I could not attack before I knew the numbers of my enemy." The Indian smiled and put his arm round Davy's shoulder. "Yesterday, one of my braves saw you, and I knew you had come to rescue the white woman. I thought I would use you as bait to draw Black Bear's braves from the forest – forgive me, my brother, but it was the only way I could be sure."





Davy laughed. "I see you are a more cunning hunter than I am, White Eagle, and you have a fine catch to show for your skill."

The Indian shook his head. "It is you who have caught the bear; the honour of the hunt is yours."

The two men turned to survey the results of the attack. In one, well-planned raid White Eagle had rid the territory of an evil blight. Black Bear was brought struggling to stand before his victors. White Eagle withdrew the tomahawk from his belt and handed it to Davy.

"We have both hunted this murderer," he said simply, "but as his captor his life is forfeit to you alone. Do as you will."

Davy took the weapon, raised it above his head, and bringing the blade down with his full force, flung it into a tree trunk several feet behind the renegade. White Eagle looked shocked.

"It is not my way, White Eagle," explained Davy, silencing the Indian's protests. "You give him to me to do with as I will. Very well. Black Bear has murdered all who stood in his path, but it is not the white man's way to answer murder with murder. I seek not revenge, but justice, and with your help I shall take him back to Natchez to stand trial for his crimes. This is my will."

White Eagle nodded. "So be it, white brother. Your ways are strange, but as you honour the customs of my people so will I respect yours. It is a sign that our peoples should live in peace."

The white woman, shaken, but unhurt, accompanied by Davy, White Eagle and his braves, and the prisoners, returned to Natchez a few days later to a triumphant welcome.

Black Bear and his confederates were duly brought to trial and sentenced, and the lives of the settlers were again made safe from violent attack. Davy and White Eagle became blood brothers according to ancient Indian lore, and a celebration such as the town had never seen bound white brother to red brother in a bond of sacred trust.

Vengeance and justice both satisfied, White Eagle and his braves set out for their village. Davy too, though feted as a hero, longed for his solitude. Beckoned by the call of the wild, each, according to his nature, had once more returned to the backwoods, to the silence of the deep forests, and the pure unbounded energies of the great rivers.

With never a backward glance Davy was swallowed up by the vast, untamed tracts of that young yet ageless continent that was America. Answering the lure of nature, of man pitting his strength and wits in his struggle against the elements, Davy Crockett strode forward into the wilds, the hunter returning to his hunting grounds.

Though the man was gone, the memory of him remained. The days of Davy Crockett were to become legend wherever men strove to realise their greatness, and long after we are dead his deeds will burn strong and true in the hearts of men.



THE THREE MUSKETEERS



By Brenda Apsley
Illustrated by Paul Crompton



It was 1625, and into the town of Meung, France, rode a young man called D'Artagnan, bound for Paris. He carried a letter from his father for M de Treville, captain of the king's musketeers, whose exploits and adventures were famous. D'Artagnan's father hoped that the captain would help his son find his way in the world.

Outside the Jolly Miller inn, D'Artagnan noticed three men pointing and laughing at his horse, which was a strange yellow colour. "Your horse looks like a buttercup!" laughed one.

Angry D'Artagnan lunged at the man, but he was hit by the man's two friends, and carried into the inn to recover.

"Who is that youth?" the stranger asked the inn-keeper.

"I don't know," the man replied, "but he carries a letter for M de Treville."

"Then Milady must see nothing of him," said the stranger, and rushed outside.

Recovered, D'Artagnan was on his way out when he saw the man talking to a woman in a carriage. After a short conversation they both sped off in opposite directions.

It was then that D'Artagnan discovered that his letter was missing; the stranger had stolen it! He swore that one day he would avenge the theft.

In Paris, D'Artagnan called on M de Treville, and asked to be admitted to the musketeers. M de Treville was just explaining that immediate entry was impossible when D'Artagnan glanced out of the window, cried, "He shall not escape me this time!" and rushed from the room.

He ran straight into Athos, one of the most famous of all the musketeers, and a quarrel ensued. The two agreed to meet at noon to fight a duel.

At noon, D'Artagnan met Athos, who had Aramis and Porthos, two other musketeers, as his seconds. The duel had hardly started when Cardinal Richelieu's guards arrived. "Duelling is illegal," said one. "You are under arrest. Follow me!"

But the musketeers – and D'Artagnan – drew their swords instead, and the cardinal's men were soon defeated. D'Artagnan's brave actions won him the friendship of the three musketeers, and also won him a place in a company of guards as a reward from the king himself, who was glad to hear of the cardinal's defeat. If he distinguished himself, one day he too would be a musketeer.

One day D'Artagnan's landlord came to him with a problem. "My wife is seamstress to the queen," the man explained, "and yesterday she was carried off. I believe it happened because of the secret love affair of another lady – the queen herself, who is involved with the Duke of Buckingham, Prime Minister of England. The queen believes that someone has written to the duke in her name, asking him to come to Paris. If he does come, the cardinal will capture him. My wife's abductors may frighten her in order to learn the queen's secrets."

"Who carried your wife off?" asked D'Artagnan.

"A noble of lofty bearing, with black hair, piercing eyes, and a scar on his temple."

"That's the man of Meung!" said D'Artagnan. "I will help you find your wife *and* get my revenge. From now on, Athos, Porthos, Aramis and I are at war with the cardinal!"





The next day, M Bonacieux was arrested, and the cardinal's men waited in his rooms for any unwary visitors. D'Artagnan waited in *his* rooms above. . . .

Hearing a woman's cries, D'Artagnan rushed down the stairs and put the cardinal's men to flight, then he and Madame Bonacieux fled. She would tell him nothing of her abduction and escape, but asked that he leave her at a safe distance. This he did, then made his way home.

Near his house he saw two figures, a man and a woman. The woman looked like Madame Bonacieux – and the man looked like Aramis!

D'Artagnan took a short cut and confronted them. "It is *not* Aramis, then!" he cried.

"No, it is the Duke of Buckingham," whispered Madame Bonacieux. "You may ruin us all!"

D'Artagnan apologised, and asked how he could serve the duke. "Follow us to the Louvre," said the duke, "and if anyone follows, slay him!"

The duke reached the royal residence safely and, in a dim room, he was joined by the queen, Anne. He threw himself at her feet and kissed the hem of her robe. "I did not write to you!" said the queen. "You are in grave danger! Go, return to England!"

"What do I care!" said the duke. "At last I see you again."

"But you must go!" said the queen. "Here, take these in memory of me!" And she handed him twelve diamond studs. The duke rushed from the room.

What of the man of Meung? He had his spies in the Louvre, and lost no time in telling Cardinal Richelieu that the queen had given her diamond studs to a mysterious visitor. Immediately, he wrote a letter that was to be delivered to Milady, the Comtesse de Winter, in London, one of his spies. *Milady, be at the ball the Duke of Buckingham attends, the letter read. He will be wearing twelve diamond studs. Cut off two of them, then inform me.*

Then the cardinal hurried to King Louis, who was not fond of his queen. He hinted that Buckingham had been in Paris, yet was careful not to openly accuse the queen of having seen him. "But there is one way to be sure," he added. "Give a ball, and tell her majesty that she should wear the diamond studs you gave her."



The king did as the cardinal suggested, and when Madame Bonacieux heard of the trap, she offered to help her mistress. The queen wrote to the Duke of Buckingham, asking him to give the studs to the bearer, and Constance Bonacieux ran from the palace with the letter.

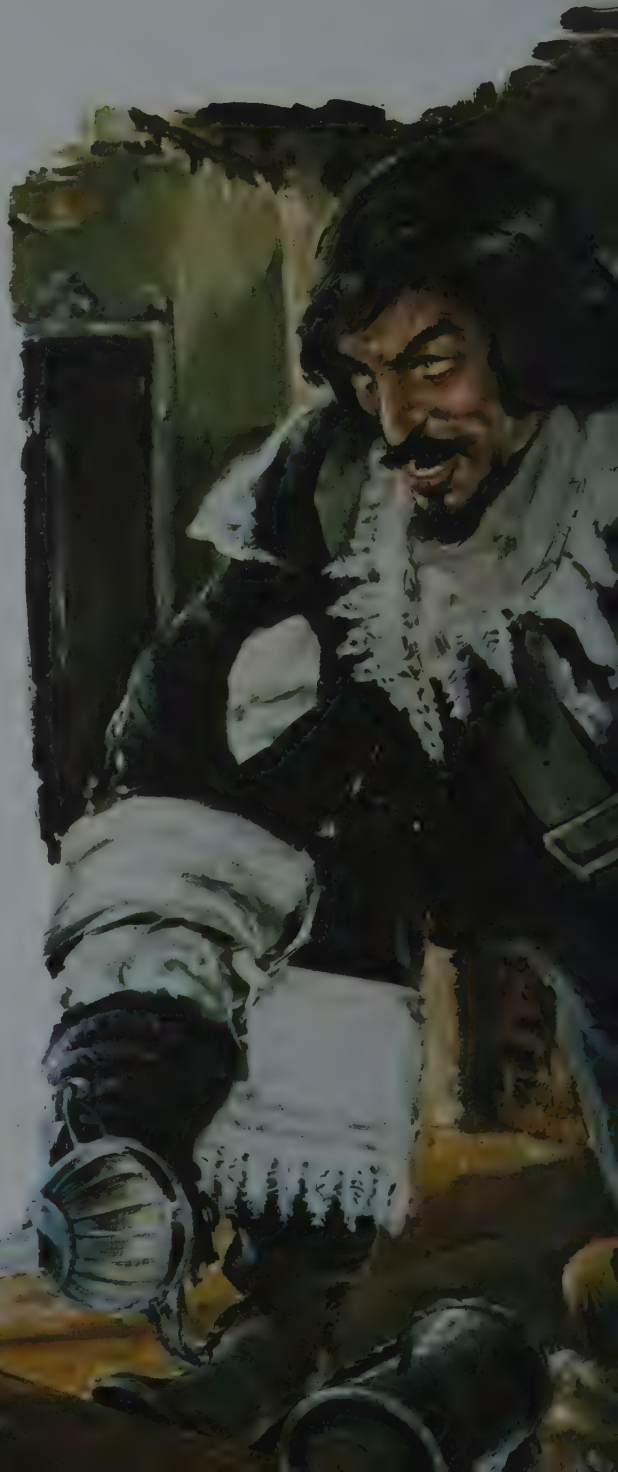
At home, she found her husband, who, unknown to her, had agreed to spy for the cardinal in exchange for his freedom. Unwisely, she told him all that had happened. It was only when he rushed, flustered, from the house that she realised that he was no longer to be trusted. Who could she trust to deliver the letter to London?


That question was answered when D'Artagnan entered the room. "I know that you are in trouble," he said. "I am brave, and devoted to the queen – and to you. Let me help."

Madame Bonacieux sensed that she could trust D'Artagnan, and told him the whole story. He immediately agreed to go to London with the letter. "Go right away," she warned, "before the cardinal can act."

Soon after, D'Artagnan, with his friends Athos, Porthos and Aramis, rode out of Paris. They stopped at an inn and, just as they were leaving, a stranger picked a quarrel with Porthos, and a fight started. "We must ride on, Porthos," said Aramis, and the three men were forced to go on without him.

A little further along the road the three riders were fired upon from a ditch and, with Aramis wounded, then were forced to ride on to safety. Leaving Aramis at an inn to recover, the others went to the stables to collect their horses to find that they had been drugged, and were not fit to travel. Then when Athos went to pay the bill, he was accused of passing counterfeit money, and was immediately arrested. "Go now! Escape while you may!" he cried, and D'Artagnan leapt onto a nearby horse and galloped off along the Calais road. Perhaps these incidents were bad luck – or perhaps they were the fruits of the cardinal's plotting!



A detailed illustration of a man with a beard and a large, dark, wide-brimmed hat, looking upwards with a determined expression. He is wearing a dark, textured coat over a white shirt. A small, rectangular, glowing green object is visible on his chest. The background shows the complex rigging and masts of a sailing ship against a cloudy sky. The overall style is reminiscent of classic pulp magazine illustrations.

Safely in England, D'Artagnan delivered the letter, and the duke rushed to get the diamond studs – only to find that two were missing! "I wore them at a ball the other week, when the Comtesse de Winter paid me a lot of attention. I know she is one of the cardinal's spies – she must have stolen them!" The duke ordered that no ship be allowed to leave London without permission, then he ordered his jeweller to make copies of the stolen studs.

Within two days D'Artagnan was on board a ship bound for France, with the original studs and the two copies. As the ship passed close by another he thought he saw the woman of Meung. If only he had known that it was the Comtesse de Winter, the cardinal's spy!

In Paris all talk was of the king's great ball. Just before the dancing started the cardinal gave the king the two diamond studs. "I think you will find that two of the queen's diamond studs are missing," said the cardinal. "Ask her where they are."

The king did as the cardinal suggested. "But I have all my studs," the queen said. "Count them."

None were missing. "What do you have to say, Cardinal?" asked the king.

The cardinal's plan had failed! "Please, take the extra studs, your majesty," he said, flustered.

"Thank you," said the queen, "for I am sure they have cost you dear!"



When D'Artagnan got home he found a letter from Madame Bonacieux, asking him to meet her the next evening. But there was no sign of her at the appointed meeting place, and an old man who lived nearby told D'Artagnan that he had seen some men carrying off a struggling woman towards Paris.

D'Artagnan determined to find his three musketeer friends – they would help him find Madame Bonacieux.

He found Porthos and Aramis at the inns where he had left them to recover from their wounds, then he rode on in search of Athos.

He found him at an inn, sitting in front of an empty bottle of wine. He seemed to have drunk a large amount of wine, and insisted on telling D'Artagnan a story. "It concerns a noble friend of mine," Athos began. "He fell in love with a young girl, beautiful as an angel. He married her, and made her first lady of the province. One day when she was out riding with her husband an overhanging branch ripped the sleeve of her dress, and guess what was on her shoulder! A fleur-de-lis – the brand of a common thief!"

"What did the noble do?" asked D'Artagnan.

"He had the right of life and death on his land," Athos replied. "He hung her from a tree. And that story, my friend, has cured me of the love of beautiful women!"

Soon after, they set off for Paris, collecting Aramis and Porthos on the way, and determined to find Madame Bonacieux.



One day, by chance, D'Artagnan saw the woman of Meung, and determined to meet her; perhaps she knew something of Madame Bonacieux's disappearance. They met, and got along very well indeed, with Milady showing great interest in the young man and his friends. D'Artagnan, who had been warned that she was the cardinal's spy, told her that he was anxious to become one of the cardinal's guards.

But in spite of his caution, D'Artagnan soon started to fall under Milady's spell, and fell deeply in love with her. He was surprised, therefore, when he saw her maid carrying a letter which was not addressed to him. Jealous, he ripped open the letter and read it. It was a love letter, addressed to another of the cardinal's spies, the Comte de Wardes! While pretending to love D'Artagnan, she was secretly meeting another!

D'Artagnan decided to spring a trap. He intercepted the next letter, and replied in the name of the Comte de Wardes, saying that he would call on Milady on Tuesday evening.



At the appointed hour he was shown into a darkened room; Milady believed that he was the Comte! "I am happy in the love you have expressed," she said, "and I love you also. Here is a pledge of that love." She took a ring from her finger and placed it on D'Artagnan's!

The next morning D'Artagnan went to see Athos to ask his advice. He told him everything, and showed him the sapphire ring. Athos grew pale. "This is an old family jewel," he said quietly. "I myself gave it to someone I loved once, a long time ago."

D'Artagnan wrote another letter to Milady, supposedly from the Comte. In it he said that he would not be visiting her any more. What effect would it have on her?

The next time D'Artagnan visited Milady, she asked if he would do something for her. "I have a great enemy, the Comte de Wardes," she said. "I want you to kill him for me."

Her words struck D'Artagnan with great force. She was a monster! He decided to tell her what he knew. "I have your ring," he said. "The Comte de Wardes of last Tuesday and I are one and the same person!"

Pale and terrible, Milady took up a knife and lunged at D'Artagnan, who threw her to the ground. Her gown ripped and there, on her shoulder, was the fleur-de-lis brand.



Milady looked at D'Artagnan with loathing; he now knew her terrible secret. . . .

D'Artagnan ran from the room to Athos's house. "Milady is marked with the fleur-de-lis!" he cried.

"So that wretched woman lives, after all!" said Athos. "She did not hang!" And then he confessed a secret – Milady had not been the wife of a friend – she had been *Athos's* wife!

When D'Artagnan reached his home he found a letter from Cardinal Richelieu, asking the young man to call on him. The cardinal greeted D'Artagnan warmly. "You are brave and prudent," he said. "I like men of heart, men of courage. What do you say to a commission in my guards?"

Surprised, D'Artagnan hesitated.


"You decline? You refuse to serve me?" said the cardinal. "Then from now on I would not give a farthing for your life. One day our account will be settled!"



D'Artagnan had no time to ponder on the cardinal's threat, for the next day he had to march out of Paris to fight for the king at Rochelle. As he marched he failed to notice Milady pointing him out to two rough-looking men. She was planning her revenge. . . .

The siege of Rochelle was one of the great political events of Louis XIII's reign, and one of the cardinal's great military enterprises. Rochelle was the last stronghold of the king's enemies, the Huguenots, and the last gateway into France open to the English. By defeating Rochelle, the king and the cardinal were also defeating Buckingham, who supported the Huguenots. Thus the fight was not confined to Frenchmen fighting Frenchmen, but to Frenchmen fighting Englishmen.





One day when he was off duty, D'Artagnan was walking along a country road when he was ambushed. A musket ball tore through his hat, and he dropped to the ground as though dead.

His assailants showed themselves, and D'Artagnan sprang to his feet, his sword at their throats. "Who paid you to kill me?" he asked.

"A woman called Milady," said one. "Here is her letter." *Since you have lost track of that woman,* the letter read, *do not miss the man.* Milady wanted D'Artagnan dead, and she was looking for Madame Bonacieux!

Not long after, when D'Artagnan was mounting guard, Aramis, Porthos and Athos were riding into camp one evening when riders approached, and they saw that one was the cardinal. "You are brave and loyal musketeers," he said. "Please escort me to a nearby tavern, the Red Dovecot, where I must meet a lady."

At the tavern the cardinal asked the musketeers to wait for him, then went upstairs.

Athos paced the floor as he waited and noticed that, as he passed a broken stove-pipe which ran from the room to the one above, voices could be heard. He placed his ear against the pipe and heard a word that made him start. "Milady!" he repeated. That was who the cardinal had come to meet!

Athos listened to the cardinal's words: "Go to London and find Buckingham," he said, "and tell him that to oppose me is futile, for at the first sign of his success, I will ruin the queen. If he is difficult, kill him. Here is a letter of safe passage. In return, I will help you find this Madame Bonacieux."

Athos snatched his hat and rushed from the tavern. "Tell the cardinal I have ridden on as look-out," he said.

Outside, he hid until the cardinal and his escort had left, then knocked at the tavern door. The landlord showed him to an upstairs room. He entered and bolted the door behind him. "The Comte de la Frere!" gasped Milady, turning.


"Yes, though I am known as Athos now, since you brought such shame on my family. You thought me dead, just as I thought you hanged?"

Milady nodded. "What do you want?"

"I know that you are the cardinal's spy, that you threaten Buckingham, and that you tried to have D'Artagnan killed." He paused. "Hand over your letter of safe passage." He paused. "And now that I have drawn your fangs, viper, bite if you can!" he said, and was gone.







Athos told the others what had happened, and D'Artagnan gave them *his* news – the king had made him a musketeer! Now the three musketeers were four.

They decided to write to Lord Winter, Milady's brother-in-law. Winter believed that Milady was heiress to his vast fortune, but this was not so, for she had married his brother after marrying Athos. No doubt she would kill him to get her hands on the money. *Be on your watch*, the letter warned. *If you doubt her guilt, read her history on her shoulder*. They also wrote to the queen, telling her of the threat on Buckingham.

Both letters were answered. The queen wrote that she understood what was happening, and Lord Winter wrote that he would take care of Milady.

By this time Milady was on her way to England to carry out the cardinal's orders, safe passage or no. But a surprise awaited her – she was carried off to a fortified, guarded house. Lord Winter was taking no chances. . . .

Milady tried to persuade Lord Winter to release her, but, realising he would not, she turned her attentions to one of his officers, Felton. Soon he fell under her evil spell, and promised that he would help her to escape.

One night Felton arrived outside the window of Milady's room, and he quickly filed through the bars. They escaped down a ladder, then raced for the shore. Felton's whistle was answered by the appearance of a small rowing boat, which carried them to a larger vessel moored offshore.

"We sail for Portsmouth," said Felton. "Lord Winter has sent me to get Buckingham to sign an order for your transportation. I have to see him before he sets sail for Rochelle with his fleet."

"He must not sail!" cried Milady hysterically. "I must prevent it!"

"He *will not sail*, I promise you," said Felton.

Milady started with joy. Felton was under her spell – he would do anything for her – anything. Buckingham would die.





Portsmouth was alive with preparations for the war, and no one noticed the stealthy figure who made his way to the Duke of Buckingham's headquarters. Felton produced Lord Winter's letter, and was allowed to enter.

He walked across the room, clutching a dagger under his tunic, and fell upon the duke, plunging the knife into his side before anyone could prevent it. "Traitor," cried the duke out loud. "Thou hast killed me."

Felton was about to rush from the room when he was seized by Lord Winter. "I guessed what you would do under that evil woman's spell!" he cried. "Oh, I am but a moment too late to save the duke."

Lord Winter handed Felton over to the guards and rushed into Buckingham's room, where he found the duke lying in a pool of blood. Just then a messenger from France entered the room, and Queen Anne's last letter to the duke was read out to him. She asked that he abandon the war with France, and told him that she loved him and thought of him constantly.

Buckingham tried to smile a last smile, but death checked his wish and he fell, lifeless, to the floor.

Lord Winter immediately rushed from the room. "That cursed woman!" he seethed. "I swear this crime shall be her last!" And he ran towards the harbour.

The musketeers were still fighting at Rochelle, but one day they were told to escort the king to Paris in great secrecy. This would give them a few days leave in Paris, and D'Artagnan determined to visit Madame Bonacieux, who had been rescued by the queen, and was staying in a convent. He intended taking her where she would be safer.

The four musketeers were riding into a tavern near the convent when D'Artagnan started and pointed to a man. "It is he!" cried D'Artagnan. "That cursed man who always brings misfortune in his wake: Milady's friend – the man from Meung!"

"We will not catch him now, for his horse is fresh while ours are weary," said Athos. "Let us find Madame Bonacieux first; we can deal with him later."

As he spoke the landlord rushed from the tavern, clutching a piece of paper. "Sir," he called to the disappearing horseman, "you dropped this!"

D'Artagnan took the paper. It said one word: *Armentieres*, and it was written in Milady's handwriting!





"This address could be useful later," said Athos, "but first, Madame Bonacieux." The four rode off for the convent.

Milady, meanwhile, had returned to France with news for the cardinal: she had made sure that Buckingham could cause no further trouble. In return the cardinal told her that Madame Bonacieux was at the convent, and she made her way there.

Pretending to be a friend of D'Artagnan's, she told Madame Bonacieux that he had sent her as a protectress. As she spoke there was a knock at the door, and the cardinal's agent, Rochefort, the man from Meung, entered.

When Madame Bonacieux had left the room Rochefort asked where the cardinal could find her. "I will be here," she said, handing Rochefort a piece of paper. "At Armentieres." It was this piece of paper that the musketeers discovered at the inn just a couple of hours later.

When he had gone, Milady called Madame Bonacieux to her. "That was my brother," she said. "He tells me you are in great danger from the cardinal's men. You must hide. Come, I have a house nearby." But just as they prepared to leave the convent Milady stopped and listened – she could hear approaching hoofbeats. She went to the window, and saw the plumes in the musketeers' hats.

"It is the cardinal's men," she told Madame Bonacieux. "Come on, we must escape!"

Madame Bonacieux took two faltering steps, then fell to her knees. "I cannot walk," she said. "You must escape alone."

"And leave you here!" seethed Milady. "No, never!" Then a wicked glint shone in her eye, and she ran to a table and poured a small phial of powder into a glass of wine. "Here, drink this," she said. "It will give you strength." She held the glass to Constance's lips, and forced her to drink. "This is not how I would have chosen to take my revenge," she said, "but what else could I do?" And with that she rushed from the room.

Madame Bonacieux prepared to meet her fate at the hands of the cardinal's men, but it was the musketeers who rushed into the room. She tried to rise, but fell back. "My head is swimming," she cried. "I cannot see."

Athos's eyes fell on the empty wine glass. "Who gave you this wine?" he asked.


"That woman," said Constance. "The Comtesse de Winter. Oh, I fear that I am dying – do not leave me." Her beautiful face was distorted, her eyes fixed, and her body shuddered convulsively.

"It is useless," said Athos sadly. "There is no antidote for her evil poison." As he spoke, Madame Bonacieux sighed deeply, then fell back, dead.

Just at that moment a stranger appeared in the doorway. "I am Lord Winter," he said. "I have followed Milady from England to prevent her committing more crimes, but I see I am too late."

"We must avenge this death," said Athos. "Come, we must find that woman soon, before she escapes us!"



A dark, moody illustration of a man's face and hand, likely Athos, with a white text box on the right. The man has a dark beard and is looking down. His hand is visible at the bottom, with fingers slightly spread. The background is dark and textured.

D'Artagnan wanted to ride to Armentieres, but Athos was more cautious. He found a map of the area, and sent four servants along the four roads that led to the village. They were to meet in the morning, and if they had discovered where Milady hid, three were to stand guard while the fourth acted as guide to the musketeers. That done, Athos went out to the edge of the town, and called on a pale man with thick hair and a black beard. After exchanging some words with the man, he returned to the inn, where Lord Winter and the musketeers were to spend the night.

In the morning one of the servants reported that Milady was staying in a house in Armentieres, and the party, plus the stranger, rode for the village that night. When they reached the house Athos signalled to the others to wait, then he walked to the window. When Milady caught a glimpse of his face she screamed, and rushed for the door – only to be confronted by the musketeers. “What do you want with me?” she whispered.

“We intend to judge you according to your crimes,” said Athos. “We accuse you of poisoning Madame Bonacieux, and of causing the assassination of the Duke of Buckingham. I gave you my name and wealth, too, only to find the brand of a thief upon you!” He turned to the others. “What penalty do you demand?”

“The penalty of death!” they replied.

Milady realised that there was no hope, and walked with the stranger, who was an executioner, to the river bank, where her hands and feet were bound. The musketeers watched as he rowed her to the far bank, and made her kneel before him. He raised his arms, and a moonbeam glinted on his sword. His two arms fell, then Milady's body fell to the ground.

He put the body into the boat, rowed into the middle of the river, and dropped it into the waters crying, "Let the justice of God be done!"



Some days later the musketeers were riding out again for Rochelle when they were halted by a stranger. It was the man of Meung. "I have orders from the cardinal to arrest you, D'Artagnan," he said. "Come with me."

Soon D'Artagnan found himself standing before the cardinal. "You are charged with corresponding with the enemies of France," said Richelieu.

"Who makes these charges?" countered D'Artagnan. "Milady, a murderess and spy?"

The cardinal started. "If that is true, she will be punished," he said uneasily.

"She is punished already," said D'Artagnan. "She is dead." And he told the cardinal of her execution.

"So," replied the cardinal, "you and your friends are assassins. Do you know the penalty?"

"Yes, your Eminence," replied D'Artagnan calmly, "but I have a pardon." And he produced the letter that the cardinal had given to Milady as safe passage, excusing the bearer of any crime.

The cardinal was beaten!



D'Artagnan and his friends went on to serve with bravery and distinction for many years, proud of the uniform of the king's musketeers. Yet of all their adventures, none compared with that of the queen's diamond studs.

TREASURE of the high seas



Written by Clive Hopwood
Illustrated by Paul Crompton

THE year was 1688, and England, with the overthrow of King James II, was once more on the verge of war with France. Everywhere the talk was of the threatened hostilities, and nowhere was speculation more rife than in the London dockside taverns, where seamen would gather to air their theories over a tankard or two of ale.

On this particular night the Lamb Inn was packed to the rafters with would-be admirals, all putting forward their favourite strategies about how they would rout the foreigners—if only the authorities would give them leave.

"As a true-born Englishman," one old sea-dog was declaiming, "I'll challenge any who dares say the French have the beating of us—what I do say is the man's a fool who claims the war will be but a matter of a few week's campaigning. It'll be a long, hard knock, and many a brave lad will see the bottom of the Channel afore it's through."

Several men shook their heads gravely, acknowledging the wisdom of the veteran's remarks. Another of them, one of the younger members, piped up, eager to make his mark in the discussion.

"My lieutenant says to me the other day, he says that there won't be no big sea battles this time, that what Admiral Torrington will do is mount a blockade along the French coast, bottle 'em up in the ports and pick 'em off as they tries to scuttle away."



"Blockade!" snorted the old sailor. "'Tis a waiting man's way, enough to wear the patience of a saint. If we had the likes of Drake and Hawkins in our fleet today we'd not be content to sit back and wait till their ships fall apart from old age. We'd be up and at 'em, striking terror into their hearts, and sinking their ships where they lay."

This sentiment provoked a roar of approval from the sailors and further calls for more drinks. Away from the crowd, however, alone in a booth to one corner of the inn, sat a well-weathered sailor, the dark tan of his skin bearing the mark of an Englishman long used to the climate of more tropical shores.

He leant forward, his tankard before him, quietly listening to all this talk of war, mindful but solitary, preferring his own silent company to the rabble-rousing of the other drinkers. He motioned to the young pot-boy as he passed, and proffered his tankard to be replenished.

The boy, a young lad of barely more than twelve years, took it from him and stood for a moment gazing at the noisy crew, his eyes alight with the dreams of adventure.

"'Tis a sure thing, this war with the French, so they say," he ventured to the solitary drinker.



"Aye, so they say," replied the man thoughtfully.

"I have hopes of going to sea myself," added the boy, unasked.

The man looked at the boy through his dark eyes, and drew his attention away from the others.

"Drake and the Armada's a hundred years ago, boy, though I dare say dying's much the same now as it was then," he said laconically. "I should remain a pot-boy and be thankful for staying alive, boy. The sea's a fine thing, but adventure can be as dark as ever it was rewarding."

"But you're a sailor yourself, sir," he said, "and like as not, bound for the sea again, if I'm not mistaken. Why is it you seek to discourage me?"

"Sit down, boy, if you've a moment," answered the man suddenly. "It's no discouragement I preach—more, say, that I'd open your eyes to what being a sailor is like. I've a tale or two might educate you, if you've a mind to listen."

For the next few minutes the pot-boy could be seen racing to and fro, dispatching drinks to the men, so that their pots were primed and full. Business done, he returned to the lone man's table, planted the replenished pot before him, and settled himself to drink in the sailor's words.

"It were this way, boy, that fate turned me to the sea, for it were not of my own doing. Say rather that I trod a path that was already picked out for me, long before I was born." The sailor settled back into his seat and fixed the pot-boy with a steady look. "Take care how you choose your way, boy, for once the sea is in your blood you'll take no other way, for it unfits you for anything but being a jack tar for life. So it was with my great-grandfather, William Reynolds, for that was his name.





"It befell that in his younger days, for so I was told, our family lived among such poverty that he was driven to become a cozener, by that I mean a cheat, a thief, a cut-purse—and a good one at that," he added with a smile, before resuming his tale. "It's the lucky thief who is born to escape the gallows, boy, and when, as his lot fell out, he was taken by the authorities, he was given the choice of hanging—or the sea.

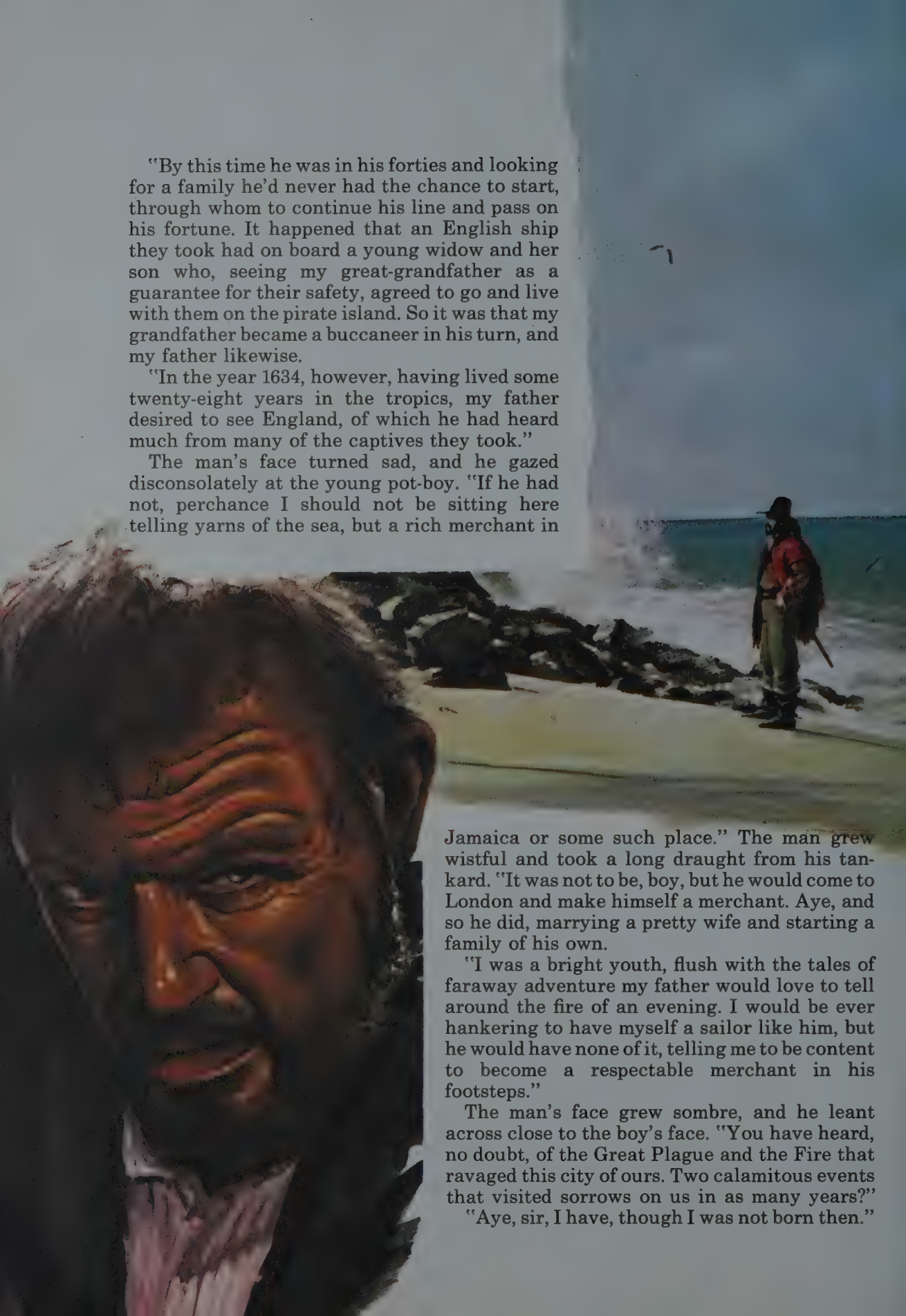
"So it was that my family became sailors, and for the first time in his life fortune smiled on my great-grandfather. It was a brutal life on board ship, but he rose steadily both in position and respect. At length he came to the notice of Drake, who took him on when he set sail to plunder the Spanish treasure ships plying their rich trade from the isthmus of Panama.

"He served with Drake for more than twenty years—in the Caribbean, on his voyage round the world, at the Armada, and until the great man's death in '96 in the West Indies. Fate again took a hand and when next he shipped out, bound for South America, his vessel was taken by French pirates; faced with the choice between death and joining his captors, my great-grandfather once more chose life. Piracy was seafaring as much as Drake's privateering had been, and the pickings were just as great. He threw in his lot with them and went to live in Tortuga, their island base.

"By this time he was in his forties and looking for a family he'd never had the chance to start, through whom to continue his line and pass on his fortune. It happened that an English ship they took had on board a young widow and her son who, seeing my great-grandfather as a guarantee for their safety, agreed to go and live with them on the pirate island. So it was that my grandfather became a buccaneer in his turn, and my father likewise.

"In the year 1634, however, having lived some twenty-eight years in the tropics, my father desired to see England, of which he had heard much from many of the captives they took."

The man's face turned sad, and he gazed disconsolately at the young pot-boy. "If he had not, perchance I should not be sitting here telling yarns of the sea, but a rich merchant in



Jamaica or some such place." The man grew wistful and took a long draught from his tankard. "It was not to be, boy, but he would come to London and make himself a merchant. Aye, and so he did, marrying a pretty wife and starting a family of his own.

"I was a bright youth, flush with the tales of faraway adventure my father would love to tell around the fire of an evening. I would be ever hankering to have myself a sailor like him, but he would have none of it, telling me to be content to become a respectable merchant in his footsteps."

The man's face grew sombre, and he leant across close to the boy's face. "You have heard, no doubt, of the Great Plague and the Fire that ravaged this city of ours. Two calamitous events that visited sorrows on us in as many years?"

"Aye, sir, I have, though I was not born then."

"Well, so it was they tore the heart and soul from my life, and cast me adrift to seek my living as I could. For it was the plague that robbed me of my family, and being but a young man with barely my first beard upon my chin, I was thrust into business with little enough knowledge to survive. But survive I did, and would, I believe, have prospered were it not that, within the twelve month, the fire had swept away my fortune, aye, burnt down every last thing I owned in this world, and I was lucky enough to escape with my life for a second time in so few months.

"In brief, I was alone in the world without a friend or penny to my name. I faced beggary or a life of crime, living hand to mouth until my neck would be stretched upon the gallows. And so it was I resolved to go to sea, to journey to Jamaica and seek those friends of my father who might still remain across the waters."

The boy gaped open-mouthed, a sense of wonder in his eyes. "'Twas a bold action, sir, to venture forth to unknown lands to join with a pirate band. And did you succeed?"

"Aye, boy, that I did. I shipped out to Jamaica and served under the greatest sailor who ever lived. These men here," he said, gesturing at the other seamen who were still heatedly discussing the war, "they talk of Drake and this, what's-his-name, this Torrington, but I tell you, if the likes of Sir Henry Morgan lived, why, these Frenchies would think twice before crossing cutlasses with us."

"You sailed with Morgan?"

"I said so, didn't I?" answered the man, sharply. "He was a hard man, as terrible a captain as you could wish to meet, but he treated a sailor squarely if he did his duty, and was never one to be short with his favours to those who served him well. But now, boy," he broke off suddenly, draining the last of his ale, "if I'm not mistaken, those men are in need of fresh drinks, as I am myself. About your business, and if you're still of a mind for more of my tale, I'll give you adventure and more, and tell you of my term under Captain Morgan."

"If you please, sir," said the boy, and without further ado he vanished into the midst of the crowd to refill their empty pots, returning in double quick time for the man to take up his tale where he had left off.

"We shipped out of the Thames, rounding into the Channel," he continued, "and caught the North East Trade winds which took us across the Atlantic. I never knew there was an ocean that big, boy, a sea so vast and rolling that I thought we'd never reach



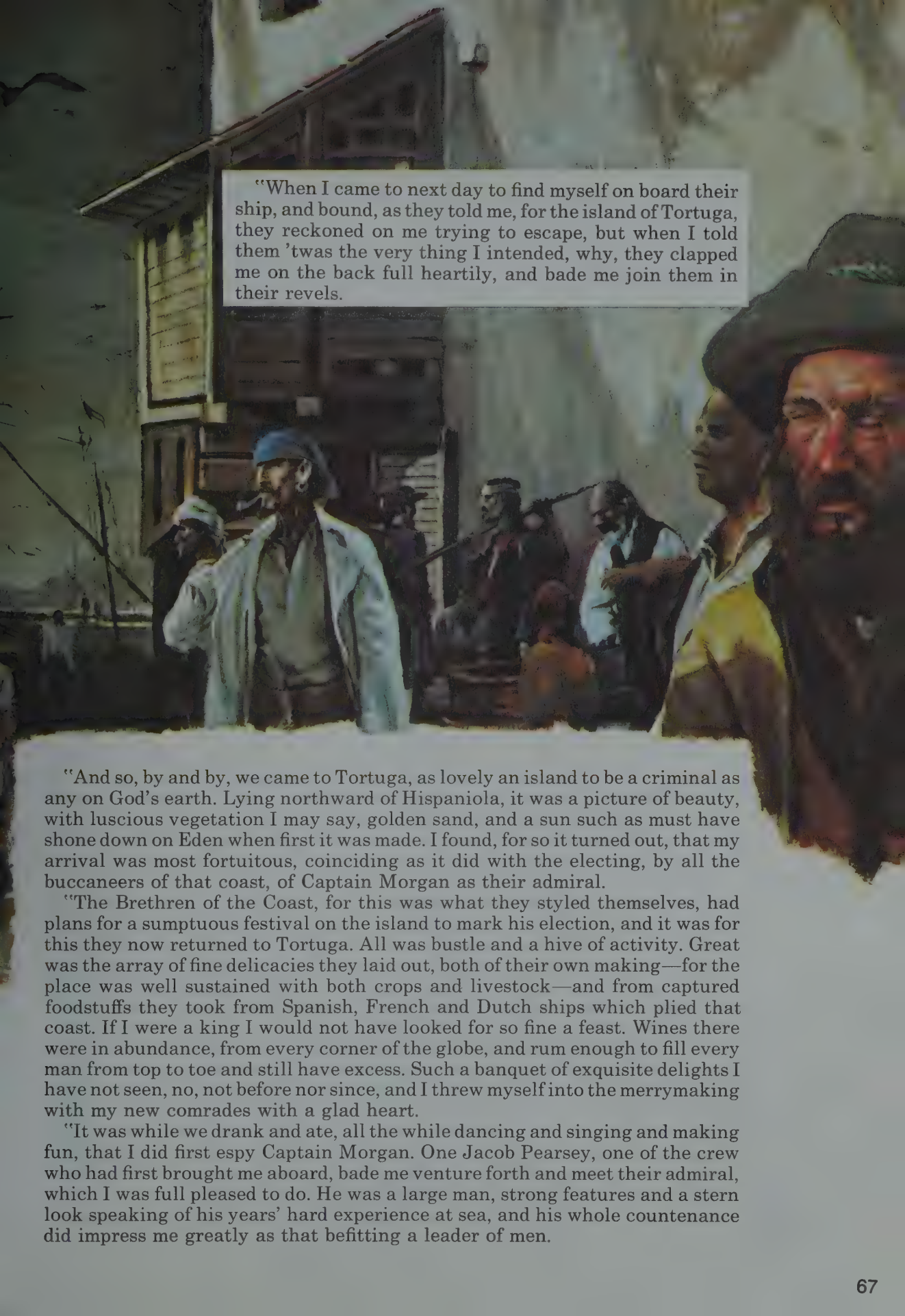
its end. Always it seemed to stretch out to the horizon in all directions, and I was filled with wonder at such a sight. I'd never seen its like before.

"It was upwards of a month before we reached St. Christopher—by that I mean the island in the West Indies—and we stood off the Nagg's Head, basking in glorious sunshine, and relaxing as seamen do, after our voyage. I had had to sign for the round trip to get myself a berth, and I reasoned that if I was set on leading a career of lawlessness, I could make no better start than by jumping ship and seeking out the men I had come to join.

"These were early days in the colony, you understand, boy, afore the law conspired to drive out piracy from the Caribbean, and privateers could more or less come and go as they pleased, seeing as how St. Christopher was English and the privateers would have none of plundering English vessels. It was an arrangement that suited well all round.

"I took myself to one of the many dockside taverns, and thirsting for any new experience, as you might say, I proceeded to drink myself into a cocked hat with a bellyful of rum for, as you may know, 'tis the drink of those parts and very easy to be had in great quantity. If I had bethought myself to join a pirate crew I could not have hit upon a plan more sure to succeed, for the captains of those ships often sent men ashore to round up and secure the merchant sailors the worse for drink, to press them into service. Like as not they would take them by main force should they offer to resist, and knock them on the head. But I, being barely half sensible with the rum as it was, I would go willingly with them and thought them a great bunch of mates.





"When I came to next day to find myself on board their ship, and bound, as they told me, for the island of Tortuga, they reckoned on me trying to escape, but when I told them 'twas the very thing I intended, why, they clapped me on the back full heartily, and bade me join them in their revels.

"And so, by and by, we came to Tortuga, as lovely an island to be a criminal as any on God's earth. Lying northward of Hispaniola, it was a picture of beauty, with luscious vegetation I may say, golden sand, and a sun such as must have shone down on Eden when first it was made. I found, for so it turned out, that my arrival was most fortuitous, coinciding as it did with the electing, by all the buccaneers of that coast, of Captain Morgan as their admiral.

"The Brethren of the Coast, for this was what they styled themselves, had plans for a sumptuous festival on the island to mark his election, and it was for this they now returned to Tortuga. All was bustle and a hive of activity. Great was the array of fine delicacies they laid out, both of their own making—for the place was well sustained with both crops and livestock—and from captured foodstuffs they took from Spanish, French and Dutch ships which plied that coast. If I were a king I would not have looked for so fine a feast. Wines there were in abundance, from every corner of the globe, and rum enough to fill every man from top to toe and still have excess. Such a banquet of exquisite delights I have not seen, no, not before nor since, and I threw myself into the merrymaking with my new comrades with a glad heart.

"It was while we drank and ate, all the while dancing and singing and making fun, that I did first espy Captain Morgan. One Jacob Pearsey, one of the crew who had first brought me aboard, bade me venture forth and meet their admiral, which I was full pleased to do. He was a large man, strong features and a stern look speaking of his years' hard experience at sea, and his whole countenance did impress me greatly as that befitting a leader of men.

"'Admiral, Captain Morgan, sir,' pipes up Jacob, bringing me before him, 'here's one who volunteered to join our band, being freshly out from England in search of a new life.'

"'Tis many a man has done the same before you, lad,' says Morgan, eyeing me up and down as if he would judge me for a seaman by mere looks. 'Is it to escape punishment for a crime, perchance, you venture here? 'Tis often the way, and gladly would we welcome you within our ranks whatever is the case, for we are but a band of rogues and cut-throats, I make plain to say, and the arts of the thief and the murderer come well to he who would be a pirate.'

"'Why no, sir,' says I, a little shocked that he should take me for such. 'It is but there has been plague and a great fire in London, and I would be a ruined man, else I should come hither and be a criminal, where the climate is more pleasing and the pickings richer than in the back alleys of Shoreditch.'

"Morgan laughed and took me by the shoulder, leading me away to walk along the shore.

"'Tis a wit we have in you, lad. 'Tis good; I like a man who shows a sense of humour in his station in life—whatever it may be.'

"'If it please you, sir,' I added, thinking to consolidate this good beginning, 'I come hither on account of my father once having plied his trade in these waters. Perhaps you may remember him—his name was James Reynolds.'

"Morgan looked thunderstruck and a broad grin split his features, as I may say, from ear to ear, if that were possible.




"By all that's wonderful, lad, I knew him well. He and I shared many a scrap on the high seas, though I was but a lad, freshly kidnapped from Bristol myself, and brought here to be a pirate. There's little I know did not come from James Reynolds and his shipmates in those days gone by. Thou art doubly welcome, I say, and I am right glad to see a son of so old and worthy a friend!"

"And so it was that I was taken in by Captain Morgan, who would hold with no refusal but that I join him aboard his own ship and fight alongside him, as he had done with my father. Indeed, I dare to say that he thought of me almost as a son, and showed me great favour and affection, to which I responded with quick enthusiasm and unswerving loyalty, applying myself with the greatest effort to learn the art of the seaman.

"The business of feasting done, we must needs return to our trade. By that, of course, I mean plundering of ships rich-laden and bursting with wealth, the lack of which was never found in these parts, gold and other precious things being one of the staples of that latitude. It happened that two days had scarcely passed than news came of a small fleet of Spaniards that set sail from the coast near Panama, being six treasure ships bearing a quantity of gold bound for Europe. The Spaniards, having grown wary of our English privateers, had thought to convoy them with two men-of-war, which news made Morgan seethe, but, I swear, not one jot did it deter him from his course of action. Rather it spurred him on, he taking this as impudence that his task should be made the harder, and he resolved to sail out with his new command, and take every last piece-of-eight they possessed, aye, and sink any who durst bar his way.






"I was mightily impressed by his boldness, his bravery and daring being such as any might admire, notwithstanding he was a pirate. I confess it compounded my resolve and gave me courage, for the thought of sailing into such a battle of cannonballs and cutlasses was such to make me shiver, who had never seen more violent action than a street brawl, or bear baiting in the ring. I determined I would not disappoint my new master, and show him I was as good a sailor and fighter as any in his command. And so I set forth on my first great adventure, though it was bloody enough and hard to bear, as you will hear presently.

"We hoisted our top-sails, hauled aft the fore-sheet, braced the yards and went our course to intercept the Spaniards. Our intelligence was good, for we had not been at sea above three days when we sighted our prey, and made good speed to prevent their escape. We spread our black flag on the poop, and the blood-red skull and crossbones, or Jolly Roger as the French do call it, at the top masthead, and having made a clear ship, we stretched away to the westward, to get wind of him.

"The Spanish Captain, seeing at once we were pirates, and guessing rightly our intention to plunder him of his precious cargo, immediately hauled upon a wind on the other tack to make good their escape. Captain Morgan's ship, together with the two that accompanied us, were basically of a Dutch design, which, as you may know, are of a lighter and faster build than most ships afloat, be it Spaniard or Englishman, and we stood after them with all the sail we could, and in two hours came almost within gunshot. Though the Spaniards crowded all the sail they could lay on, there was no remedy but to engage us, and so realising, the Spanish captain, still thinking to prevent our design, shortened his sails to slow his advance and, together with the other man-of-war, turned to meet with us.

"Captain Morgan saw at once his plan, that while we were thus engaged in battle, the four treasure ships might run upon the wind with all sail so we could not come to them again, and though we might sink two ships we would be deprived of our booty. At once he ordered our two companions to give chase and bring them to a halt by whatever means they thought best, while we took on the men-of-war. This I thought a most foolhardy design, they being two against our one and mightily armed as well, but I had reckoned without the Captain's great skill.



"Our two companions bore down upon one of the Spaniards, passing one each side as if to engage at close range, but raking it fore and aft with but one broadside, passed beyond in pursuit of the fleeing treasure ships. The other Spaniard, seeing their blockade broken so soon, was in two minds whether to give chase, and while he was thus confused, Morgan pressed home his attack, catching him unprepared to return our fire, and disabling a great many of his guns. Coming round to his blind-side, as it were, we thus also confounded the other Spaniard, for he could not fire without hitting his companion.

"Though it is common practice for a ship to fire as it rises out of the sea from a roll, yet Captain Morgan favoured firing at the moment when the ship reached the top of the roll and began to descend. This he did as we passed the Spaniard on our starboard side, the effect being that our shots struck the hull along the water-line instead of among the masts for, as he said, it was our intention to sink the vessel rather than to merely disable it. That he had succeeded was soon all too clear, as we pulled away and rounded his stern, the Spaniard began to heel over at an alarming rate. Nor could he discharge his guns at us, for one side pointed too low at the water, the other too high, this being the result of our holing him.

"One of our enemies dispensed with, Captain Morgan made clear his intention to sink the other, though this was the Spanish captain's vessel and armed with above a hundred guns, as one of my shipmates swore to me, and we with barely seventy. As we left the slowly sinking vessel behind, it was evident our intervention was sorely needed, for the Spanish captain had given chase to our two ships and was bombarding one with such effect that it looked fit to sink itself, save we go to its rescue.

"This Morgan did, and with a daring that clean took my breath away. We kept wind of him, obliging him to run up under our lee, by that I mean the wind drove him onto us, so that when we got him upon our quarters, we received the fire of five or six of his guns. At this, Morgan gave the order and we clapped our helm hard a-weather, let go the lee-braces of the main topsail, so that the Spaniard ran his bowsprit into the fore part of our main shrouds and stuck fast.

"We immediately poured in our broadside, raking them fore and aft. The enemy could not bring above five or six guns, besides their small arms, to bear on us, while we played our whole broadside upon them, killing a great many men and wreaking havoc along the whole distance of the vessel. At length the Spaniards cried quarter, their destruction plainly imminent if we continued our devastating fire. Thus was the close of as bold an action as I could wish to see, and we rejoiced to find that we had bettered not only two men-of-war whose guns outweighed ours, but that one of our other ships had brought three of the treasure ships to a halt by raking them with grape-shot and chain-shot, which brought down both rigging and masts, disabling their sails so they could not run; thus they lay becalmed so that we could easily come up with them. Seeing their protectors beaten, the captains of the treasure ships surrendered their cargoes to us, and though one was able to escape us, yet we were well pleased with the plunder we received."





The man sat back, a far-away look in his eyes, as if his mind drifted back to those long-gone days when he had first become a pirate. For a few moments he sat there in his silent reverie, until the pot-boy leant forward and pulled at his sleeve.

"What happened then, sir?"

"Then?" answered the man, as if waking suddenly from a dream. "Why then we sailed back to Tortuga, and many a time afterwards we ventured out onto the high seas in search of precious cargoes, and much wealth we gathered, so that all feared the name of Morgan and his pirate fleet on the Spanish Main."

"I expect you sank hundreds of ships?" suggested the boy.

The man smiled. "Why, only as many as was necessary. A pirate will avoid a fight as well as the next man if he thinks he can get what he wants without shedding blood – particularly his own. I can tell you, we robbed many a ship by sheer reputation – as soon as they realised it was Morgan they faced, many a merchant man would sooner give up his all than risk battle with the captain."

"Was Captain Morgan a cruel man then, sir?"





"Ar, he was and he wasn't, as you might say," replied the man. "I've seen him torture men, to discover from them their hiding places, in ways too horrible to describe to the likes of you, and then again I can remember him refusing to sink a ship. 'For,' he says, 'tis the heart of two thousand oaks in that ship, and of a beautiful design, the labour of months for some craftsman. I'd not see her destroyed.' This dismayed us all, till, of course, he takes her for his own when she was captured – I dare say she'd have gone to the bottom if she'd been an ugly ship," laughed the man.

"What of your other adventures, sir? Are there more?"

"Indeed, young lad, enough to fill your head till breakfast time, though I have in mind one that might be to your taste." The boy sat expectantly, nodding eagerly his assent to hear of this.

"Well, it fell out this way, you see. I'd been with Morgan nigh on two years, when the Governor of Jamaica, Sir Tom Modyford himself, sends word to the Captain as to how he wished an interview of him, and sends his assurances that none will seek to detain him. So off goes the Captain, and me along with him, to see what the game is.



"'Captain Morgan,' says the Governor, when at last we were brought to him, 'I hear good accounts of your adventures against the Spanish and her allies.'

"'Tis true, sir," replies Morgan, wary of where this might lead. 'I have, in my time, accounted for a Spaniard or two . . . but never an English vessel was scarred by my cannon balls.'

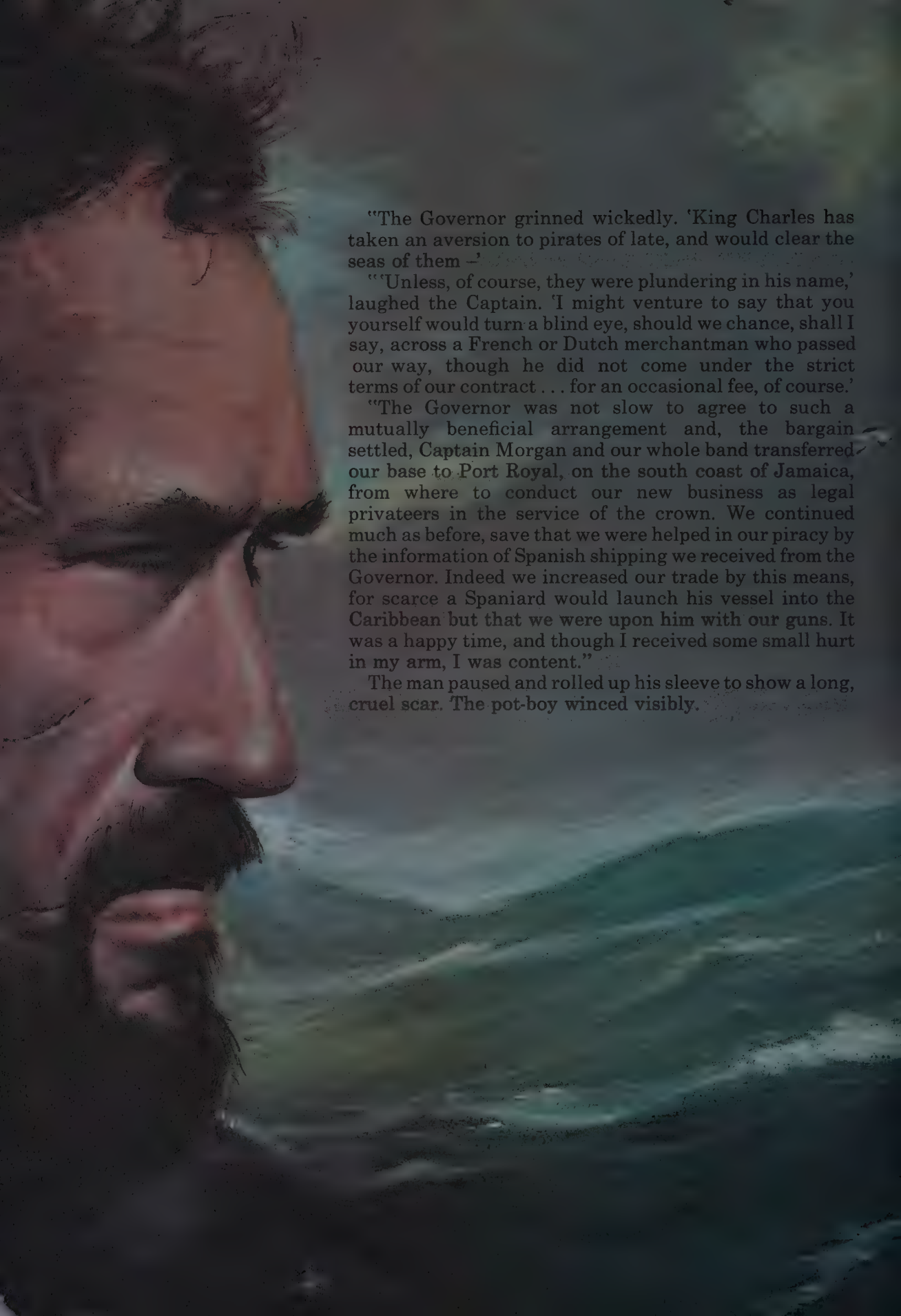
"'I know it well, Captain,' says the Governor. 'Rest assured. I have in mind an offer you may care to consider, which will be of advantage to both yourself and his Majesty's government. In short, we would engage you as a privateer against the Spanish; his Majesty desires they should be shown who's master.'

"I could see the Captain was tempted, for to be the instrument of the King in pursuit of crime could only be to our advantage. The Governor, obviously eager to acquire the services of so accomplished an adventurer to his cause, further outlined the terms of his offer.

"'We would expect no concession from your gains, Captain, merely your loyalty in pursuing our aims. To be blunt, we require that you sink all the Spanish shipping you may find, in addition to which there are one or two coastal towns whose coffers you may wish to empty.'

"The Captain eyed the Governor closely. 'And if I should refuse?' he asked, desiring to know the full lie of the land.





"The Governor grinned wickedly. 'King Charles has taken an aversion to pirates of late, and would clear the seas of them —'

"Unless, of course, they were plundering in his name,' laughed the Captain. 'I might venture to say that you yourself would turn a blind eye, should we chance, shall I say, across a French or Dutch merchantman who passed our way, though he did not come under the strict terms of our contract . . . for an occasional fee, of course.'

"The Governor was not slow to agree to such a mutually beneficial arrangement and, the bargain settled, Captain Morgan and our whole band transferred our base to Port Royal, on the south coast of Jamaica, from where to conduct our new business as legal privateers in the service of the crown. We continued much as before, save that we were helped in our piracy by the information of Spanish shipping we received from the Governor. Indeed we increased our trade by this means, for scarce a Spaniard would launch his vessel into the Caribbean but that we were upon him with our guns. It was a happy time, and though I received some small hurt in my arm, I was content."

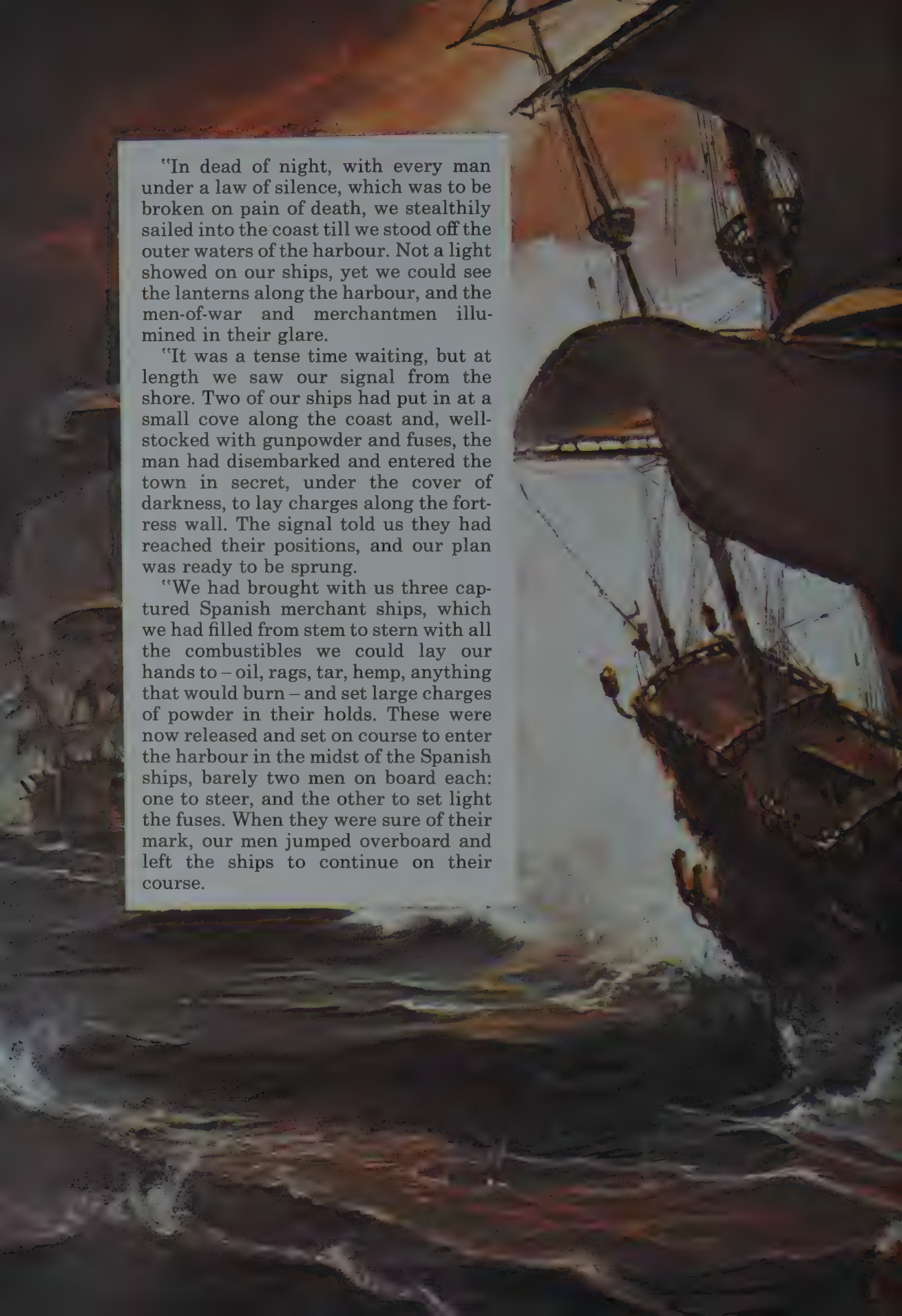
The man paused and rolled up his sleeve to show a long, cruel scar. The pot-boy winced visibly.



"You must learn to see this and much worse, boy, if you'd be a sailor. Always remember, 'tis not the cannonball you should fear, but the splinters from the wood when it strikes home. Why, I've seen – but enough of such horrors, you will see it by and by if you should go to sea. To rejoin my tale, I was much aided by our surgeon who saved the limb, and I was soon fit again, and ready to play my part in one of Morgan's most ambitious schemes – the raid on the Spanish garrison at Porto Bello.

"I tell you this, lad, to show you this Torrington, who commands His Majesty's fleet in the coming war with the French, is no admiral worth his salt. Morgan, though he be dead these bare few months, would be the man to rout these French – as you shall learn.

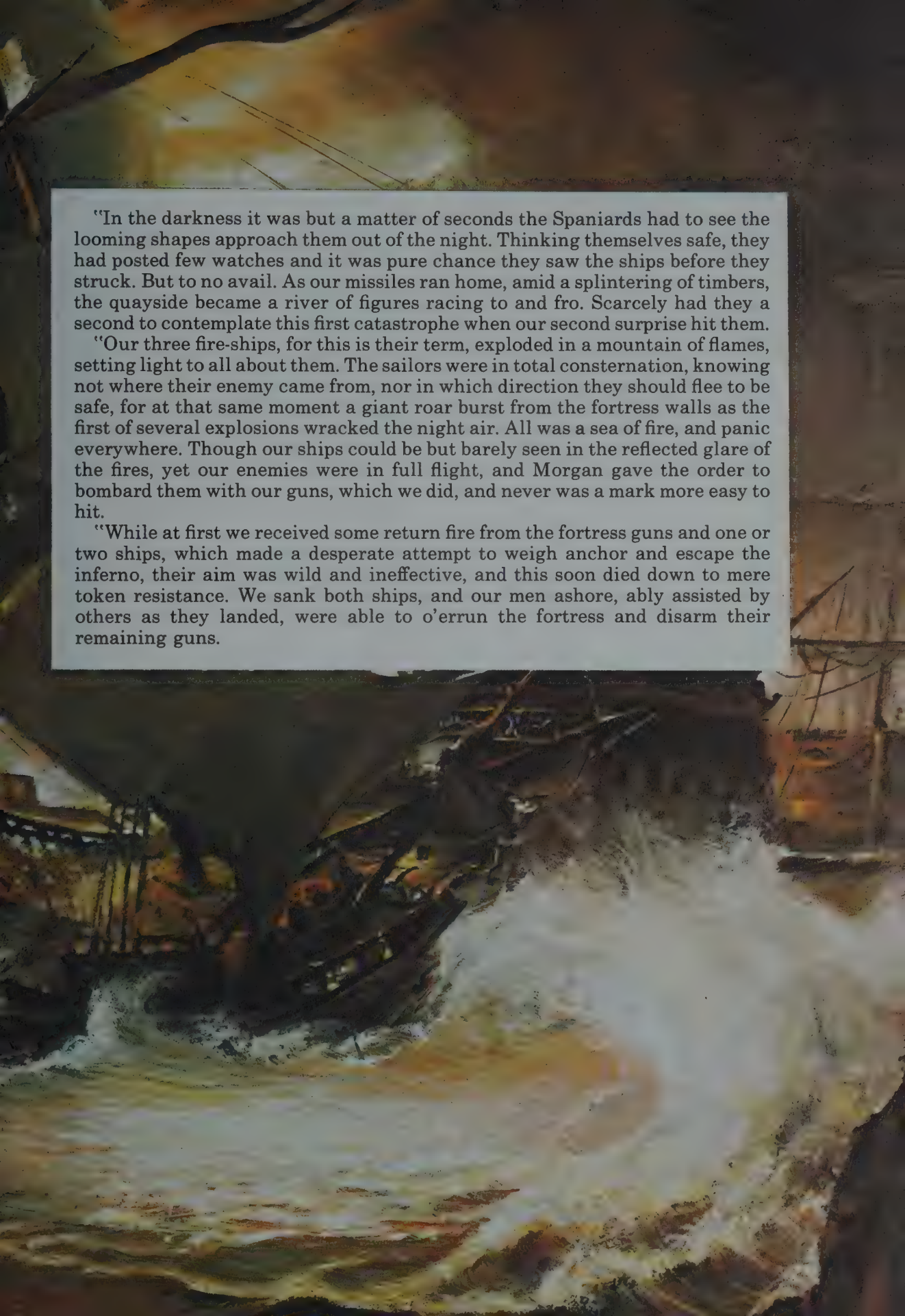
"Morgan's plan was such as would fright the devil if he were asked to fight. Porto Bello, on the isthmus of Panama, was heavily fortified, there being a garrison with a small army of soldiers, and cannon bristling from the ramparts overlooking the harbour. To add to this, ten Spanish men-of-war lay at anchor, so our friendly Governor informed us through his spies, and yet Morgan made bold to say we would sack the place and come away with a fortune. We laughed, half with fear, it seemed so absurd, yet as we listened our eyes grew wide just as our hearts grew bold. This was the way of it:



"In dead of night, with every man under a law of silence, which was to be broken on pain of death, we stealthily sailed into the coast till we stood off the outer waters of the harbour. Not a light showed on our ships, yet we could see the lanterns along the harbour, and the men-of-war and merchantmen illumined in their glare.

"It was a tense time waiting, but at length we saw our signal from the shore. Two of our ships had put in at a small cove along the coast and, well-stocked with gunpowder and fuses, the man had disembarked and entered the town in secret, under the cover of darkness, to lay charges along the fortress wall. The signal told us they had reached their positions, and our plan was ready to be sprung.

"We had brought with us three captured Spanish merchant ships, which we had filled from stem to stern with all the combustibles we could lay our hands to – oil, rags, tar, hemp, anything that would burn – and set large charges of powder in their holds. These were now released and set on course to enter the harbour in the midst of the Spanish ships, barely two men on board each: one to steer, and the other to set light the fuses. When they were sure of their mark, our men jumped overboard and left the ships to continue on their course.



"In the darkness it was but a matter of seconds the Spaniards had to see the looming shapes approach them out of the night. Thinking themselves safe, they had posted few watches and it was pure chance they saw the ships before they struck. But to no avail. As our missiles ran home, amid a splintering of timbers, the quayside became a river of figures racing to and fro. Scarcely had they a second to contemplate this first catastrophe when our second surprise hit them.

"Our three fire-ships, for this is their term, exploded in a mountain of flames, setting light to all about them. The sailors were in total consternation, knowing not where their enemy came from, nor in which direction they should flee to be safe, for at that same moment a giant roar burst from the fortress walls as the first of several explosions wracked the night air. All was a sea of fire, and panic everywhere. Though our ships could be but barely seen in the reflected glare of the fires, yet our enemies were in full flight, and Morgan gave the order to bombard them with our guns, which we did, and never was a mark more easy to hit.

"While at first we received some return fire from the fortress guns and one or two ships, which made a desperate attempt to weigh anchor and escape the inferno, their aim was wild and ineffective, and this soon died down to mere token resistance. We sank both ships, and our men ashore, ably assisted by others as they landed, were able to o'errun the fortress and disarm their remaining guns.

"With whoops of joy we leapt out from our vessels on to the quayside, and beat back, in fierce hand-to-hand fighting, the Spanish soldiers who dared to throw us back. With Captain Morgan by my side, we hacked and thrust and cut our way through the withering ranks until, at last, we came to the Spanish Governor himself. He was a brave man, this I will say, but no match for Morgan at sword play, and before long he had fallen victim to the Captain's blade.

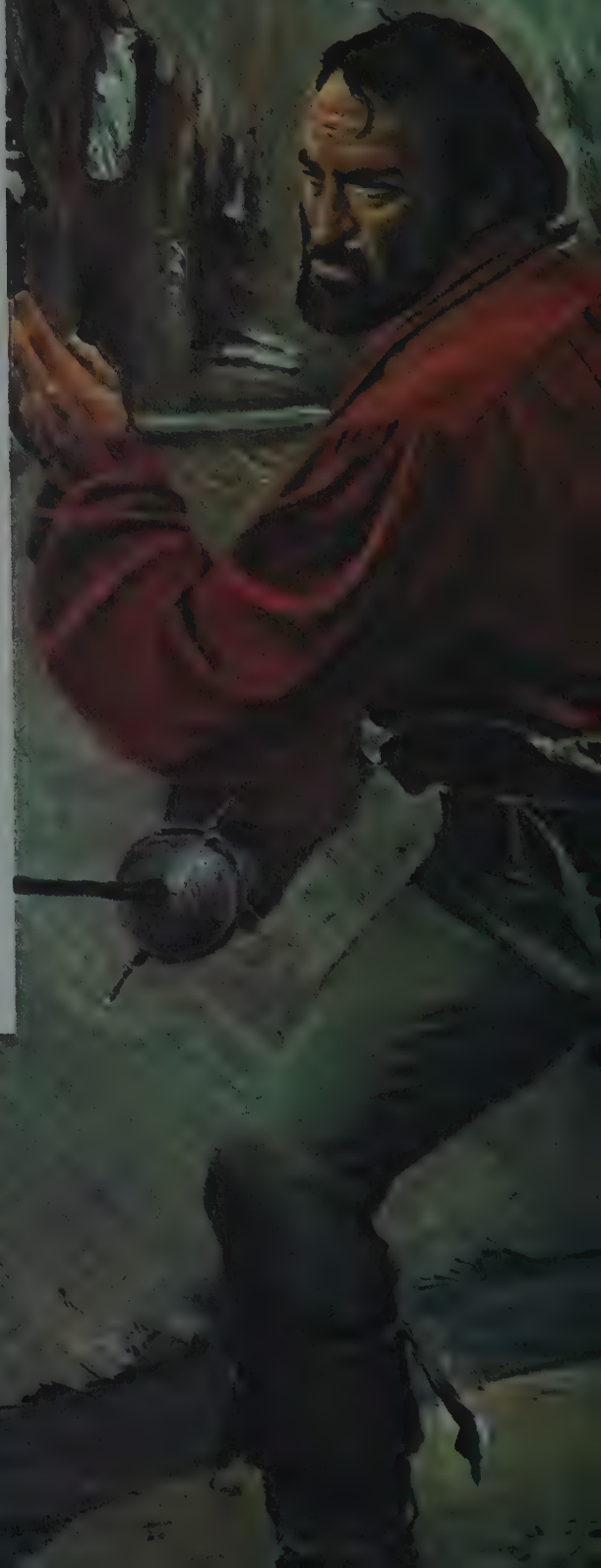
"What a victory, boy! The garrison blown up, ten Spanish men-of-war destroyed! With our spoils from the city, and a handsome reward from King Charles, we made a haul of two hundred and fifty thousand gold pieces!"

The pot-boy seemed struck dumb with wonder, but found his tongue soon enough when the man did not continue.

"And after that, sir, were there more adventures?"

The man looked up wearily. "More? Aye, there were more, but is your appetite so big you would burst your belly at one sitting? A score of treasure ships, no, three score, the sack of Panama – now there was a battle . . . but enough! Time anon for more tales, boy, I must to bed, for I am tired." The man rose to go.

"Sir," said the pot-boy, tugging at his sleeve yet again. The man turned questioningly. "Thank you, sir, for telling me of your adventures; I am even more resolved to go to sea after what I have heard."





"Do you say so?" laughed the man. "Why then you must, for I see there is no stopping up your ambition, but listen to me, boy. If you would chance the hurricane winds and throw yourself upon the mercy of the waves; if you would see your friends cut down in the thick of battle and have death as your constant shipmate; if you would risk all this to go to sea, why then, 'tis a sailor you must be."

"I shall, sir." The boy paused a moment. "What should I call you, sir?"

"Call me? Why nothing, 'tis of no consequence."

"But I should like to remember you, sir."

"Tom Reynolds is my name, boy, and if you're still of a mind to go to sea on the morrow, why, you shall have my name on your lips every day – you can ship out with me. Like as not I can find a berth for you."

The boy's eyes lit up like beacons of delight. "Will you go to fight the French, sir?"

The man threw back his head and laughed. "The French, boy, for a pittance of wages? No! I'm bound once more for the West Indies. There's a captain there, I hear tell, might find my services agreeable. Kidd's his name, Captain Kidd."

ROBIN HOOD -outlaw of sherwood



By Hilda Young
Illustrated by Glenn Rix



Robin Hood and Sir Guy of Gisborne

One warm summer's day Robin Hood and his loyal band of outlaws sat sharing a merry meal in the greenwood, beneath the shady oaks of Sherwood Forest.

Much-the-Miller's son, now himself called Much by the forest bowmen, had roasted a huge haunch of the king's royal venison, and there were also platters of good fresh vegetables, bowls of juicy fruit and pitchers of rich thick cream on the rough oak bench which served as a table. The vegetables, fruit and cream were the gifts of a grateful farmer whom Robin had recently helped to pay his heavy taxes.

All the good food was washed down by tankards of golden mead, brewed by local monks, caskets of which had fallen off the waggon as it travelled through Sherwood on its way to the Sheriff's wine store at Nottingham Castle.

The driver of the waggon had taken fright when an arrow had winged its way through the trees and, in his haste to be gone, he had left several caskets of wine behind on the grassy sward.

"I am sure that the Sheriff would be delighted to learn that his mead has fallen into our hands," chuckled Will Scarlet, as he raised the tankard to his lips. Will was the only outlaw to wear scarlet stockings with his tunic of Lincoln green, and he was nicknamed thus to distinguish him from Will-the-Wrestler, another member of Robin's band.

Robin sat with his loyal friend Little John, a little way from the rest, and Little John noticed that although Robin laughed at Will's jest, his eyes were thoughtful, as if his mind was faraway.

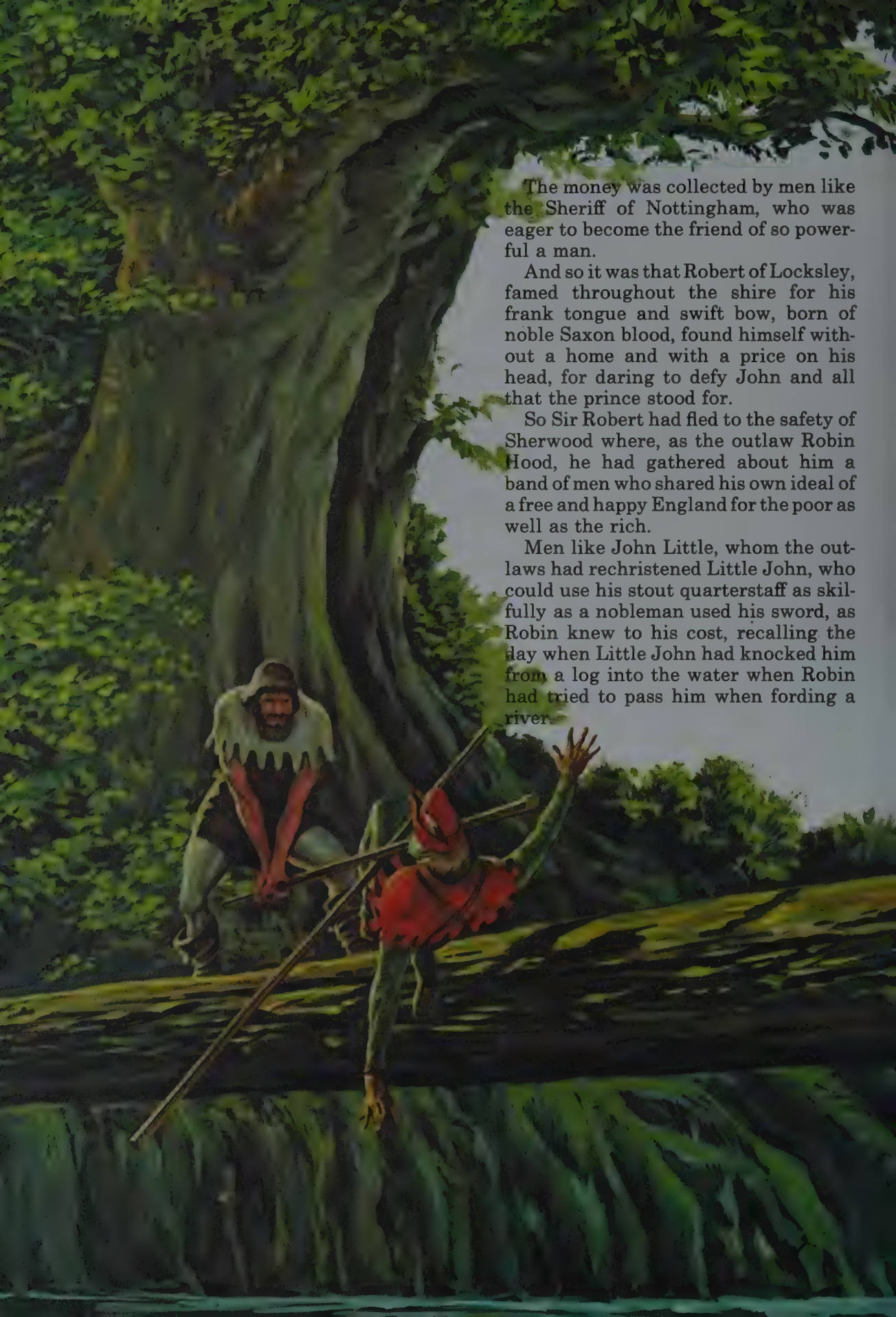
And indeed, Robin Hood's thoughts were of other times and other places. . . .

It was now several months since Robin had fled to the greenwood rather than bend the knee and pay lip service to Prince John, who was acting as Regent of England while King Richard was away at the Crusades.

A loyal subject of the king, Robin had grown to hate the man whose word was now law. John was mean and cruel, making a mockery of justice, and all the poor and needy truly feared him.

Cottages and crops were razed to the ground as a warning to those who refused to pay the heavy taxes which John imposed. The money was supposed to go to help King Richard in his fight in the Holy Land, but everyone knew that it found its way instead into John's own coffers.





The money was collected by men like the Sheriff of Nottingham, who was eager to become the friend of so powerful a man.

And so it was that Robert of Locksley, famed throughout the shire for his frank tongue and swift bow, born of noble Saxon blood, found himself without a home and with a price on his head, for daring to defy John and all that the prince stood for.

So Sir Robert had fled to the safety of Sherwood where, as the outlaw Robin Hood, he had gathered about him a band of men who shared his own ideal of a free and happy England for the poor as well as the rich.

Men like John Little, whom the outlaws had rechristened Little John, who could use his stout quarterstaff as skillfully as a nobleman used his sword, as Robin knew to his cost, recalling the day when Little John had knocked him from a log into the water when Robin had tried to pass him when fording a river.



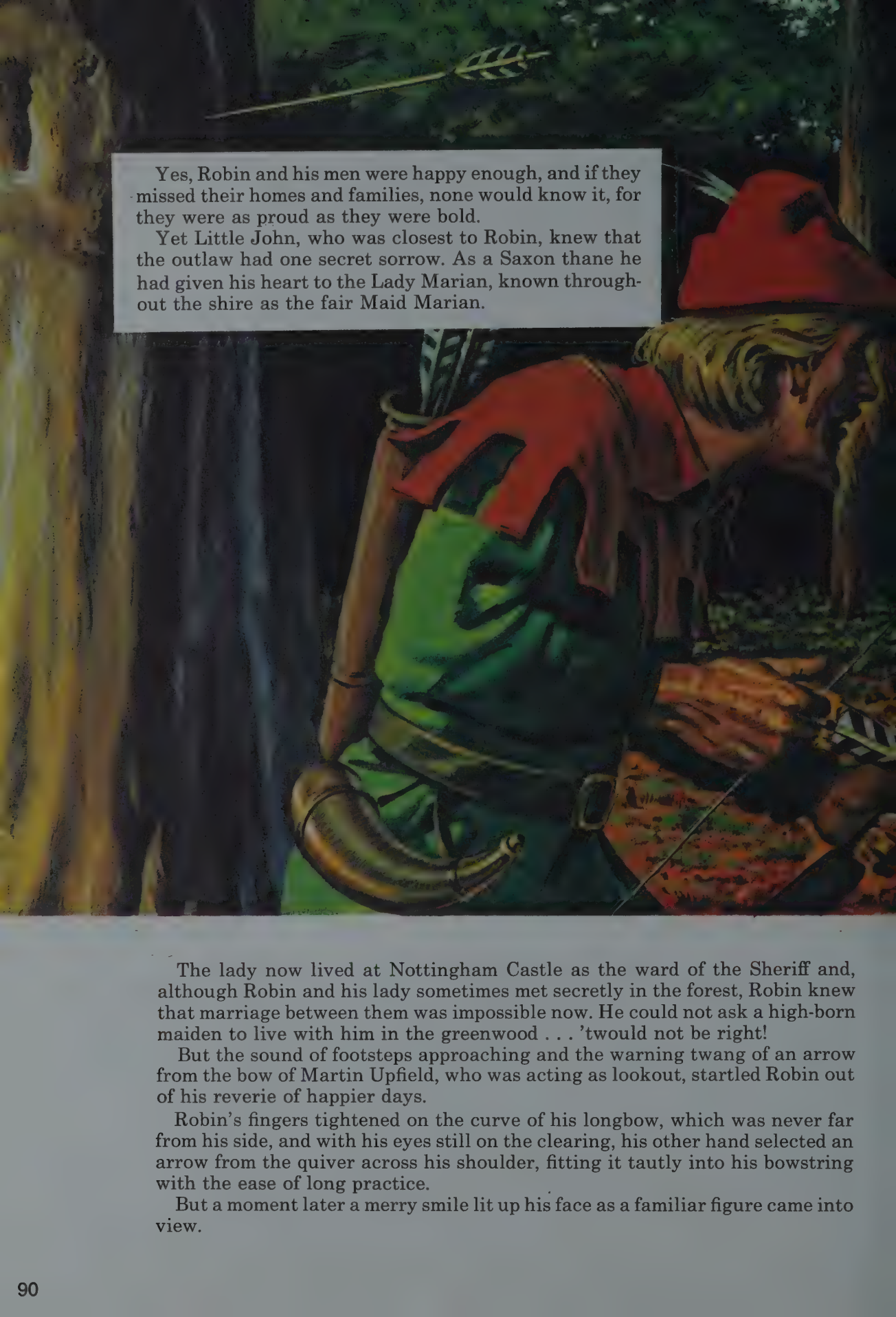
Then there was Will Scarlet, Martin Upfield, George Pinner, whom some called George-A-Green, and the minstrel Allan-A-Dale, who sang songs of Robin's bravery, kindness and skill with his bow of English yew.

There were tradesmen like Much, Donald the tanner, Arthur-A-Bland the potter, and many others who brought their skills to the greenwood, and who in return were taught to shoot with a longbow and use a knife or staff with skill and cunning.

In the months that followed Robin's flight to Sherwood, the rich found it no easy task to travel through the forest. Wealthy merchants and knights were relieved of their purses and jewels, which later found their way into the hands of a poor widow with several children, or were given to villagers to pay their crippling taxes.

The deeds of Robin Hood were on everyone's lips, rich and poor alike, and the Sheriff of Nottingham put a price on Robin's head—dead or alive!

But Robin just laughed at the Sheriff's threats and went on robbing the rich to feed the poor. Often he used a daring disguise to outwit the Sheriff, appearing once as a butcher on his way to market, selling great hunks of meat for a penny, and another time as a beggar when he won an archery competition which the Sheriff had set up as part of an ambush.



Yes, Robin and his men were happy enough, and if they missed their homes and families, none would know it, for they were as proud as they were bold.

Yet Little John, who was closest to Robin, knew that the outlaw had one secret sorrow. As a Saxon thane he had given his heart to the Lady Marian, known throughout the shire as the fair Maid Marian.

The lady now lived at Nottingham Castle as the ward of the Sheriff and, although Robin and his lady sometimes met secretly in the forest, Robin knew that marriage between them was impossible now. He could not ask a high-born maiden to live with him in the greenwood . . . 'twould not be right!

But the sound of footsteps approaching and the warning twang of an arrow from the bow of Martin Upfield, who was acting as lookout, startled Robin out of his reverie of happier days.

Robin's fingers tightened on the curve of his longbow, which was never far from his side, and with his eyes still on the clearing, his other hand selected an arrow from the quiver across his shoulder, fitting it tautly into his bowstring with the ease of long practice.

But a moment later a merry smile lit up his face as a familiar figure came into view.



Throwing down his bow, Robin rushed to greet his old friend Friar Tuck, who was both Robin's steward and chaplain, and a valued member of his band. Friar Tuck had inside knowledge of the doings in Nottingham Castle which he visited frequently to give spiritual guidance to Maid Marian, the Sheriff's wife and her servants, despite the misgivings of the Sheriff who had suspicions about Friar Tuck's true allegiance.

"Good-day to you, my dear old friend!" cried Robin. "Dickon, a tankard of mead for the friar!"

"Nay, Robin I haven't time to sup with you today," protested Friar Tuck, although his eyes lingered on the tankard of golden mead, for the friar was a man who loved his food almost as much as he loved his rosary. "I have only time to give you my news. I must be back at the castle before I am missed . . . my lord Sheriff is suspicious enough of me already. He makes sly remarks each day about

my many journeys through Sherwood. He finds it very strange that Robin Hood never attacks me!"

The outlaws laughed loudly, and Little John added, "What is this important news you bring us, Friar Tuck?"

"That Sir Guy of Gisborne is abroad again in these parts," said Friar Tuck, with an anxious glance in Robin's direction. "'Tis said the banquet tonight at the castle is being held in his honour . . . and that he seeks a bride."

"So the base knight still lives, does he?" cried Robin grimly. "He is a disgrace to the whole of knighthood, and how dare he show his face here when he knows everyone has heard of how he murdered those poor villagers in Barnesdale."

"Sir Guy glories in his notorious reputation," replied the Friar. He hesitated for a moment and then he added softly, "Robin . . . the bride he seeks is the Lady Marian!"

Robin's face grew dark with anger.



"He would not dare ask for Maid Marian's hand in marriage!" he cried.

"He would . . . and the Sheriff would give it, remember she is his ward," warned Friar Tuck. "I know the news makes you angry, but take care, Robin, it may be a trap to get you out into the open!"

"That is a risk I must take, for Marian shall never marry *that* man!" cried Robin. "Little John, make what disguise you can and get you to the city to learn more news. I shall wander around in the greenwood and give Sir Guy the chance to find me. Thank you, Friar Tuck, for bringing me this news. Now away with you, back to the castle, and keep Maid Marian close by your side at all times."

So Friar Tuck hastened back to the castle to do Robin's bidding, while Robin took up his bow, his sword and his golden hunting horn and set off through the forest, leaving Little John to find what clothes he could to disguise himself.

He had not gone far when he saw a man sitting on the stump of an oak tree, not far from the oak that Robin's men had dubbed 'Robin's larder', because it held the deer which the outlaws shot for food.

Robin had never met Sir Guy of Gisborne, but he knew it was his great enemy by the clothes the man wore, for none had ever seen the like before and it was the talk of the shire.

Sir Guy was clad from head to toe in leather hide, still with the hair upon it. He wore a leather jerkin, long leather trousers, a sight not often seen in those parts, and a leather cowl (which hid most of his face), which still had a donkey's ears attached to it.

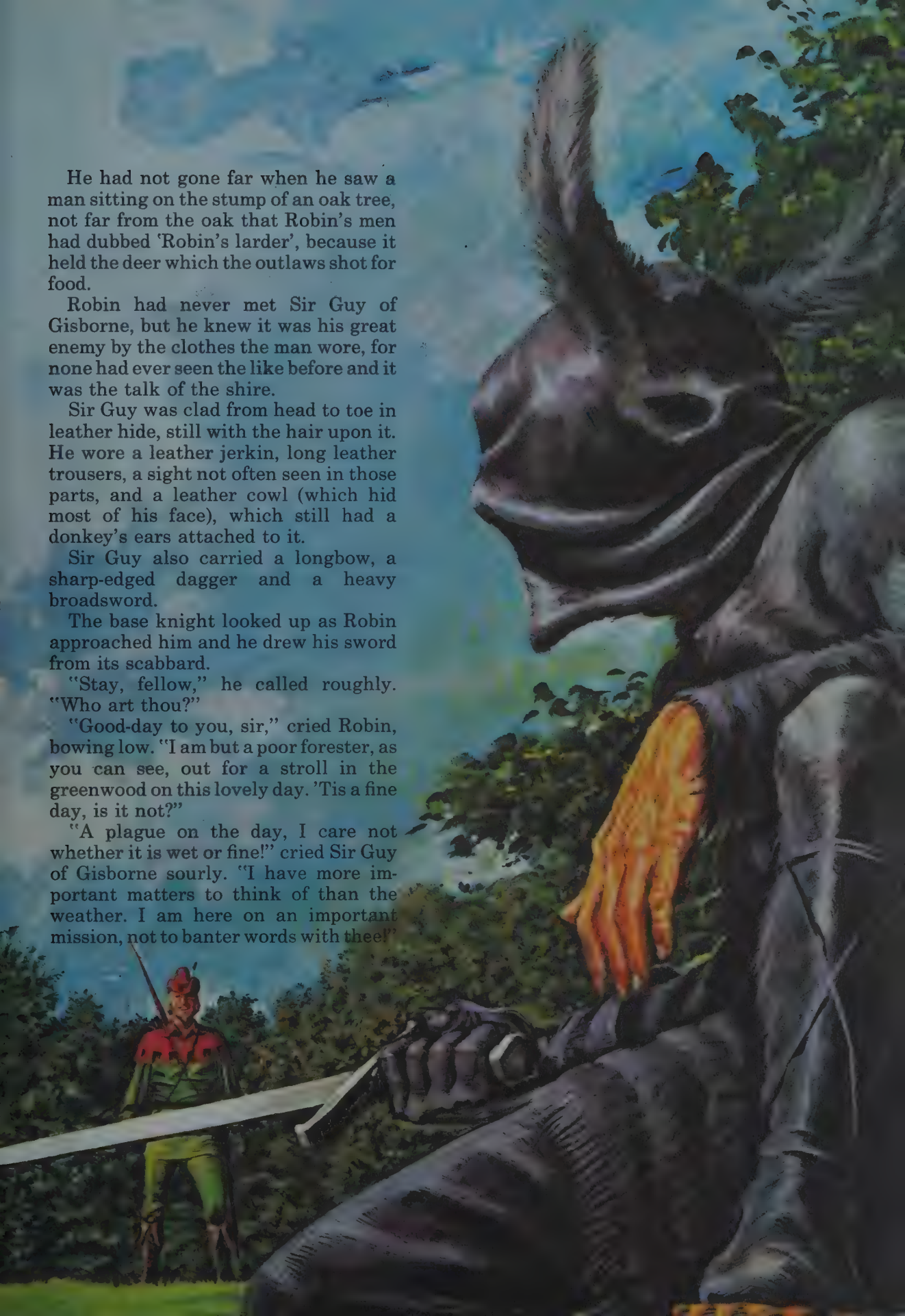
Sir Guy also carried a longbow, a sharp-edged dagger and a heavy broadsword.


The base knight looked up as Robin approached him and he drew his sword from its scabbard.

"Stay, fellow," he called roughly. "Who art thou?"

"Good-day to you, sir," cried Robin, bowing low. "I am but a poor forester, as you can see, out for a stroll in the greenwood on this lovely day. 'Tis a fine day, is it not?"

"A plague on the day, I care not whether it is wet or fine!" cried Sir Guy of Gisborne sourly. "I have more important matters to think of than the weather. I am here on an important mission, not to banter words with thee!"





Robin gave another mocking bow. "Thou must have eaten a dinner of stinging nettle," he chuckled. "It has given you a sour indigestion, my lord."

Sir Guy's face grew black with rage at Robin's mocking words. "Have a care, my young cockerel, your crowing annoys me!" he cried. "Get thee about thy business quickly, for I like not thy face or thy manners!"

"Why, my lord, how sweetly you speak," replied Robin, his face grave and serious. "I cannot bear to leave you, so I will stay and keep you company for a while and, to pass the time, let us have a contest, for I see that you have a fine bow there."

Sir Guy glared angrily at Robin, and then he threw back his head and roared with laughter.

"Thou art a bold fellow to speak thus to me," he cried. "But the idea pleases me. Put up a target."

So Robin cut a slender hazel twig and stuck it up in the ground.

"This is the kind of target a bowman of Sherwood uses," he cried. "Now let me see you split this wand."

"'Twould need the devil's own skill to do that!" retorted Sir Guy as he took aim.

"Or Robin Hood's skill," murmured the outlaw softly to himself, as Sir Guy's arrow sped through the air.

Sir Guy tried twice to hit the hazel wand, but each time



he failed, and Robin laughed merrily each time the arrow missed its mark.

"I trust you are better with sword than bow, Sir Guy," cried Robin, as his own arrow flew through the air, splitting the hazel twig neatly in two.

"I am the best swordsman in Yorkshire," boasted Sir Guy, to cover his chagrin at being bested by the forester. "When I meet up with Robin Hood, he will discover this to his cost, for only one of us shall still live!"

"You never spoke a more true word, Sir Guy! Only one of us *shall* live!" cried Robin Hood. "I am the man you seek . . . Robin Hood, outlaw of Sherwood and friend of the poor and oppressed, and therefore your enemy! You have plundered and killed for your own gain and now it is time the 'account was paid. Take up thy sword and fight!"

With these words Robin drew out his own sword, which flashed like a ray of sunlight in the cool air, a weapon of vengeance for all those poor folk who had been slain by Sir Guy.

"Hell's teeth!" cried Sir Guy, as his own broadsword felt the steel of Robin's blade. "I should have killed thee when I thought thou was a simple forester!"

"What, without time to shrive myself?" mocked Robin. "But 'tis you, Sir Guy who will die with many black sins upon thy soul!"

And so began a fight the like of which the trees of Sherwood had never seen, either before or since. Up and down the forest glade went Robin and Sir Guy, trampling the grass and sweet woodland flowers beneath their feet as they fought.

Often a sword found its mark and pricked the skin so deeply that the blood ran, for the two opponents were equally matched. Sir Guy was an evil and cruel man, but he was an excellent swordsman, and Robin had to call upon all the tricks and cunning he had learned in his early days when he was taught the art of swordsmanship.

Robin seemed to be getting the upper hand of the fight at last when suddenly he stepped backwards as Sir Guy made an unexpected thrust with his sword, and Robin caught his foot in the old root of a tree. He stumbled and fell backwards, dropping his sword as he fell, and lay helpless at the feet of his enemy.



"Now thine hour of death has indeed come!" mocked Sir Guy, as he lifted his sword to kill Robin.

But Robin's wits had not deserted him. As Sir Guy's sword plunged towards him, Robin seized it with one hand, knocking it aside, while he kicked out at the same moment with his foot, unbalancing Sir Guy so that he, too, tumbled to the ground.

Robin began to fight his enemy hand-to-hand, and the two men rolled about in mortal combat, each realising that he was fighting for life itself.

Each strove to regain his sword, with no success, but just as Sir Guy was squeezing the very life from Robin with a cruel lock around the outlaw's throat, Robin's waving fingers met the cold steel of Sir Guy's double-edged dagger, which was in a belt around the knight's waist.



With what feeble strength remained in his hand, Robin wrenched the dagger from the sheath and plunged it into Sir Guy.

Sir Guy gave one great terrible cry and, as his blood turned the grass bright red, the life of the man who had himself ended so many other lives, ebbed away.

As he looked down at the body of his enemy, Robin shook his head sadly. "This is the only man I have slain since I entered Sherwood," he murmured. "But it is true justice that so base a man should die by his own knife. Now folks in the two shires can sleep peacefully in their beds and his crimes will no longer sully my name, as they did when false witnesses said 'twas I who committed this terrible act."



Robin was about to return to his men, when a thought struck him.

"But the Sheriff knows nothing of Sir Guy's death," he cried softly. "He deserves to suffer a little for inviting such a man to his castle as a guest, and for suggesting that Maid Marian should wed him."

So, making quite sure that he was not observed, Robin stripped Sir Guy of his strange clothes and he put them on over his tunic of Lincoln green, hiding his features beneath the cowl hood, but still carrying his own horn and longbow, and wearing Sir Guy's sword and his dagger, which Robin had retrieved and cleaned of blood.

And off he went towards Nottingham Castle, smiling wryly to himself as men, women and even small children cowered away from the figure they thought was the notorious knight, Sir Guy of Gisborne.

Meanwhile, acting on Robin's instructions, Little John had disguised himself and had travelled along the same road that Robin had taken a few hours earlier.

Yet very few would have recognised him, for before setting off, Little John had enlisted the aid of Edward-the-Mummer, a member of Robin's band who had once been a strolling player and who was a master of disguise.

The other outlaws had watched, fascinated, as with paint and powder, sheep's wool curls and a large wooden bowl, Edward had transformed the strong, lofty giant to a frail looking hunchback of many summers, with snow-white hair, who looked scarcely strong enough to carry the longbow which lay over his shoulders.

"Here, old man, take this staff to help you along," quipped Will Scarlet. "And don't forget to lean on it. Don't stride out like 'tis your usual way, or all Edward's work will have gone for naught!"

"I'll remember, young master," retorted Little John in a quavering voice. "And now I must be off, for 'tis a long way to Nottingham for these old bones!"

The outlaws laughed, for they knew that Little John had the longest stride of them all.

And, indeed, Little John did stride out until he came to the main Nottingham road where other travellers might see him. Then he adopted a slow, stumbling gait, leaning heavily on his staff for support to help him along.

He had not gone far when he heard the sound of someone weeping bitterly.



"I must act now before it is too late," murmured Little John to himself, as the Sheriff's guards hustled the three youths out roughly, followed by the Sheriff, still clutching his tankard of ale.

As the widow's sons were led over to three trees in the meadow, Little John walked slowly up to the Sheriff.

"Is there going to be a hanging, Sir Sheriff?" he asked eagerly. "I likes to see a hanging . . . I was once a hangman myself!"

"Were you indeed?" laughed the Sheriff, eyeing Little John keenly. "I thought your face was vaguely familiar. Wouldst like to hang these three rogues for a silver penny? 'Twould save my men an unpleasant task. They are soldiers, not hangmen, they like to kill in fair fight!"

"I'll hang a dozen for you for a silver penny!" cried Little John. "I'll do it right now, and I'll shrive them as part of the bargain!"

"That will make a merry jest indeed!" roared the Sheriff, shaking with laughter. "Here's a silver penny. Do your duty!"

"Thank you kindly, Sir Sheriff," cried Little John, and he shuffled across to where the youths were standing.





"Have courage, lads, do as I say and all will be well," he whispered.

Then, as he bent his head as if to listen to their last prayers, he told each one to stand still while he cut the bounds which held them.

"Do not let the Sheriff and his men see what I have done," he whispered in each lad's ear. "But when you see me lift this wig from my head, throw off your noose and head for the safety of the greenwood."

So saying, he returned to the Sheriff's side.


"All is ready, Sheriff," he cried. "I will just string my bow, so that I can help them on their way after the hanging with an arrow through the heart."

"Thou art a capital fellow!" cried the Sheriff, draining his tankard. "Thou thinkst of everything!"

But John, having made certain of a clear pathway before him, cast off his wig and cried: "Run, lads, run!"

Away went the lads, free from the cords and noose that bound them, followed by Little John, as the Sheriff and his men watched in amazement.

Roused at last, they gave chase, but fell back as Little John raised his bow.



The guards recognised him now and all seemed well, for none dared risk a shot from the bow of Little John.

The three youths were well on their way to safety and all Little John had to do was send just one warning shot . . . but suddenly disaster struck. His arrow broke, and before he could replace it Little John was surrounded by the Sheriff's men and dragged before the angry Sheriff.

"So, today we shall see the end of both Robin Hood *and* Little John!" cried the Sheriff with glee. "Let us take him back to Nottingham. Everyone shall see *this* hanging!"

So, alas for Little John, he had to suffer the indignity of being tied to a horse, his face facing the filly's tail, while he was mocked by the Sheriff and his men.

"Thank goodness Robin cannot see me now," thought Little John, as the procession moved towards Nottingham. "'Tis a sad day for me, to die at the end of a hangman's rope. If only Robin or Will or Martin Upfield were here to end my life with a swift arrow. 'Twould be more fitting and a far more dignified end for an outlaw of Sherwood. To think that my life shall end because of a broken arrow. Ah me, 'tis a sad fate!"

And so they rode on, until they neared a meadow just outside the city gates.

"I think we have found a place," cried the Sheriff. "There stands a fine gallows tree!"

The Sheriff's men dragged Little John down roughly from his horse and started to pull him over to the tree.

Suddenly the Sheriff saw a familiar figure coming down the road towards them.

"Why, 'tis Sir Guy of Gisborne!" he cried. "And unless these eyes deceive me, at his belt he wears Robin Hood's horn!"

"Nay, Sir Sheriff, your eyes see clearly," cried Robin, his harsh voice taking on the tones of the man whose clothes he wore. "Let your eyes note, too, the blood on my clothes. 'Tis a sign that only one of us lives!"

"And since Robin Hood would never willingly give up his golden hunting horn, 'tis plain to see you are the victor!" cried the Sheriff, rubbing his hands with glee. "And the day's sport is not yet over, Sir Guy! We are just about to hang another outlaw, the giant they call Little John, second only in importance to Robin Hood himself!"

"It appears that we have both been busy," cried Robin, slapping his thigh, as if delighted with the news. "And since I have got rid of his master, let me hang this rogue also. I have a notion to end the lives of both master and man!"

At first the Sheriff hesitated, for he was a very vain man and *he* wanted the honour of the capture and death of Little John. But as a dark frown crossed the features of the man in the leather clothes, the Sheriff recalled Sir Guy's terrible temper and the power he wielded, not only in his own native Yorkshire, but here in Nottingham. Sir Guy was a bad man to cross, as many, more courageous than the Sheriff, had learned to their cost.



So, overcoming his reluctance, he cried with false heartiness, "Take the man, he is yours to do as you will, Sir Guy! Only please remember 'twas I who gave him to you!"

Robin smiled grimly as he nodded. "I will remember, my lord Sheriff," he promised softly, as he walked over to the tree where Little John stood, his hands tightly bound behind him.

Little John, who had been filled with despair when he heard of Robin's death, stared at his great enemy. "Kill me, O base Knight!" he cried. "Without Robin Hood I do no longer wish to live."

Robin waved away the Sheriff's men until he and Little John were quite alone. "Do not give up thy life so readily, my friend," he whispered. "Things are not always what they seem."

Little John stared in amazement at the knight who spoke with Robin's voice, then he smiled with pure happiness. Robin lived!

"Show not your joy too clearly, Little John, lest the Sheriff suspects me," warned Robin. "When I cut thy bonds free, seize this broadsword and be ready to use it well."



"Have no fear, Robin, they shall not catch me again!" promised Little John, as he felt a sharp dagger severing his bonds.

His hands now freed, Little John seized the broadsword, and at the same moment Robin threw back his cowl, revealing his face, so that all could see him clearly.

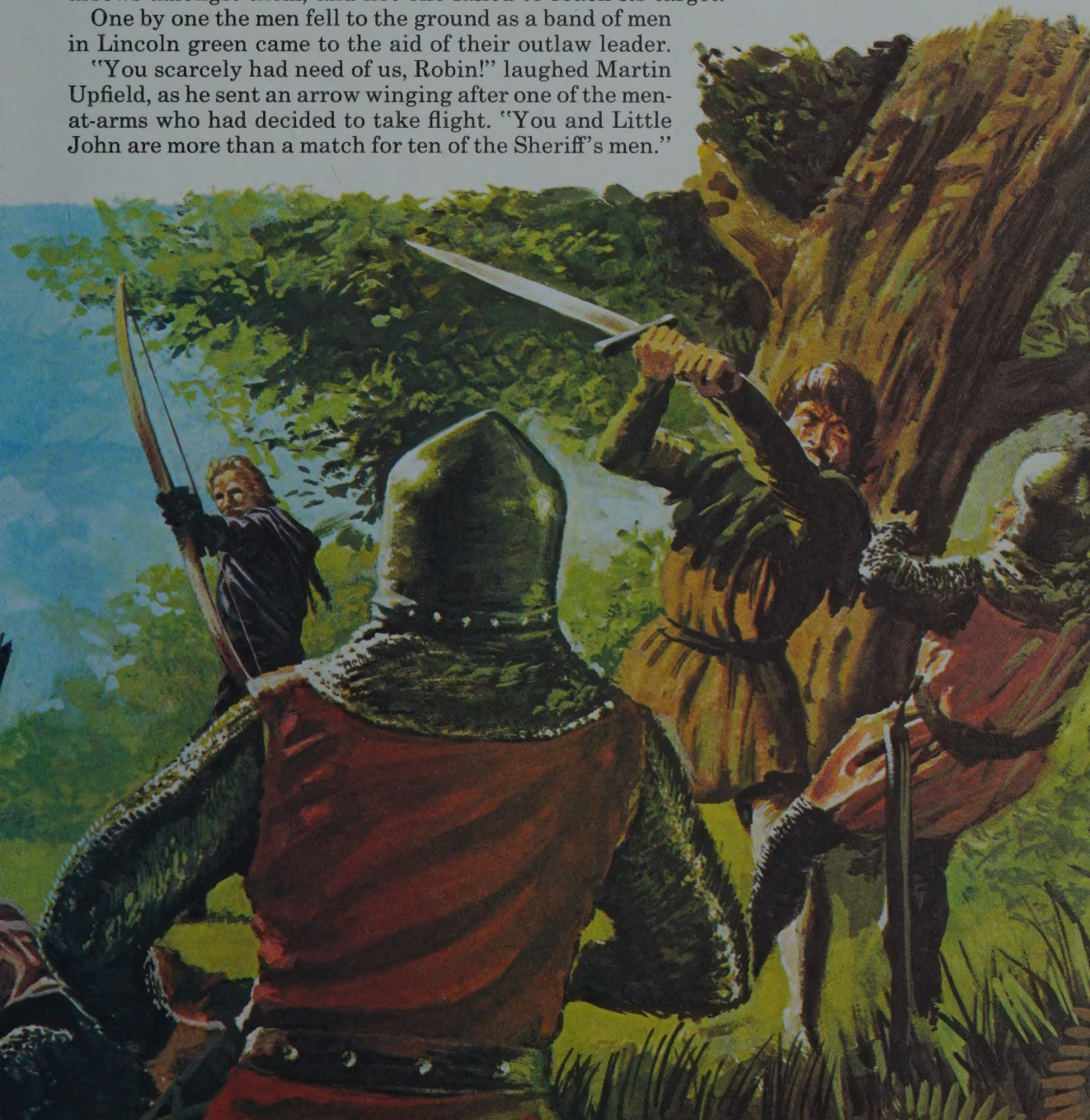
"'Tis Robin Hood! Seize him!" cried the Sheriff, jumping about with rage.

But before any of the Sheriff's men could reach him, Robin had put his horn to his lips, blowing one long blast.

As Little John attacked the Sheriff's men with his broadsword, Robin sent arrows amongst them, and not one failed to reach its target.

One by one the men fell to the ground as a band of men in Lincoln green came to the aid of their outlaw leader.

"You scarcely had need of us, Robin!" laughed Martin Upfield, as he sent an arrow winging after one of the men-at-arms who had decided to take flight. "You and Little John are more than a match for ten of the Sheriff's men."

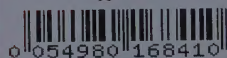




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